ALDOUS HUXLEY IN EVOLUTION

THE NOVELS 1921-1935

Jean by

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This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other graduate degree or higher diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except when due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

M. J. Hallam.

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ABSTRACT

This study argues that the novels of Aldous Huxley written 1921-1939 reflect the influence of Charles Darwin's The Origin of Species on the loss of faith and decline of traditional spiritual values representative of those times. An introduction places Huxley, his work and ideas, against the background of the late 19th century literary and scientific scene. It examines his position as a writer of popularity and influence in the years between the World Wars, in relation to his struggle to achieve a new perspective and sense of value. It also places Huxley in a critical context, suggesting that, while the decline in his literary reputation over the past 40 years reflects his weaknesses as a writer, his contribution to 20th century literature's revaluation of the role of man in an evolving universe, although generally overlooked, is significant.

The first chapter looks at the ways in which Huxley's first two novels, Crome Yellow (1921) and Antic Hay (1923), express his growing sense of the social and spiritual isolation of the individual in an evolving world, a world described by Darwin as 'an inextricable web of affinities'. This sense is brought about by his perception of the inadequacy of viewing the world in the traditional way, as a hierarchical ordering of creation with man at the apex, in God's image. The second chapter pursues this sense of isolation to its most extreme expression, the fear of death, found in the novels of the late twenties, Those Barren Leaves (1925) and Point Counter Point (1928). This fear, part of Huxley's rejection of the physical basis of human existence, is related to Darwin's influence on contemporary assumptions about mortality and change. It is seen to lead to a bleak and despairing interpretation of mankind's nature and destiny. Huxley's sense of the irreconcilable divisions in human existence is

suggested to be a reflection of his divided sense of self: from it sprang a spiritual and philosophical impasse from which no positive or developing theme could emerge.

The third chapter examines the ways in which this impasse was gradually resolved in the novels of the thirties, Brave New World (1931) and Eyeless in Gaza (1935). A more positive outlook is seen to correspond to a growing acceptance of self as a physical and emotional being, as well as a rational and spiritual one. Darwin's unifying vision of the universe, and the optimism he expressed with his interpretation of evolution as 'progress towards perfection', are incorporated into Huxley's mature outlook. A sense of an inherent division in human existence remains, but is able to be placed in a wider perspective of universal harmony.

INTRODUCTION

Aldous Huxley's impact and popularity as a writer in England in the years between the Wars were such that many expected him to become recognized as a major novelist of the twentieth century. Now, more than twenty five years after his death (in 1963), his minor status is universally acknowledged, sometimes to the extent that all mention of him is omitted from general accounts of English literature of this century.[1] That he is known as a fiction writer at all today is due mostly to his authorship of Brave New World (1931) and, to a lesser extent, Island (1962), both of them fantasies. Yet, at the height of his popularity, it was his accounts of his own immediate social environment which drew the most enthusiastic responses. Jocelyn Brooke described him as 'unquestionably one of the most stimulating and exciting writers of his day.'[2] Sir Isaiah Berlin, a contemporary of Huxley's, described his influence thus:

> to the young men of my generation ... Huxley was among the few writers who ... played with ideas so gaily, so freely, with such virtuosity, that the responsive reader, who had learnt to see through Shaw or Chesterton, was dazzled and excited.[3]

Any discussion of Huxley as a minor literary figure must therefore include an evaluation of his popularity and influence in this period, as well as the reasons for his subsequent decline in public estimation. To what extent was his popularity due to literary merit, and to what extent topicality?

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1 For example, Frederick R. Karl, A Reader's Guide to the Contemporary English Novel (London: Thames and Hudson, 1963).

2 Jocelyn Brooke, Aldous Huxley [1954] (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1963), p. 6.

3 Sir Isaiah Berlin, in Aldous Huxley 1894-1963: A Memorial Volume, ed. Julian Huxley (London: Chatto and Windus, 1965), p. 145.

A brief look at Huxley's cultural background shows that his credentials for speaking to and of his generation were impressive. His family had been at the forefront of major social change for at least two generations. Through both his parents, he was connected with some of England's best known intellectuals, writers and educators. From his mother's family, the Arnolds, he inherited a tradition of sincere orthodox religious conviction and literary achievement of a high degree. On his father's side there was also considerable literary ability, in this case put predominantly to the service of science. T.H. Huxley, Aldous's grandfather, was known as 'Darwin's Bulldog': in his time he was hardly less famous than Darwin himself, as his most powerful advocate and disciple. He was also an inspired debater, writer and public speaker. His Life and Letters were edited by his son, and Aldous's father, in 1900. From both families came a strong sense of the social responsibilities which attended the privilege of an education, the obligation to inform and guide. This was a particularly strong influence on Aldous's career as a writer.

As a young man, Aldous Huxley was accomplished in the sciences and humanities alike; he aimed initially at a career in medical research, but near-blindness caused by an eye disease in adolescence turned him instead towards a literary career. However, he always retained his interest in the biological sciences and their role in modern society. During the 1914-18 war, prevented by his defective eyesight from enlisting, he spent much of his time at 'Garsington', home of the eccentric Lady Ottoline Morell, patron of the arts. Here he came in contact with many of the leading thinkers and writers of the time: D.H. Lawrence, T.S. Eliot, Lytton Strachey, Bertrand Russell, Virginia Woolf, Maynard Keynes, among others.[4] Many of these, including Lady Ottoline herself, are recognizable as characters (or, more accurately, as

4 For an account of these years at Garsington, see Sybille Bedford, Aldous Huxley: A Biography, Vol. 1: 1894-1939 (London: William Collins Sons and Co. Ltd., and Chatto and Windus Ltd., 1973), pt. 3, chs 6-7.

caricatures) in his novels, and as the source of many of the ideas which formed such a substantial part of all his writing.

To read Huxley's fiction, therefore, is to enter the world of a sophisticated and erudite elite, where ideas that were often shocking and original to the contemporary reader were scattered around with the light-hearted ease of one to whom they were every-day fare. Huxley gained an early reputation, especially among younger readers, for being not only stimulating, but liberating. This was in a time when, although there was a strong sense of having entered the modern age, Victorian assumptions still underlay much of the way people thought, spoke and behaved. Stephen Spender, describing Huxley's influence on the student generation of the later 1920s, wrote:

> He seemed to represent the kind of freedom which might be termed 'freedom from': freedom from all sorts of things such as conventional orthodoxies, officious humbug, sexual taboos, respect for establishment.[5]

What Spender describes here was the end of a social revolution which had begun during the nineteenth century. The Great War of 1914-18 had played a significant part in it, largely by finally discrediting altogether the traditional sources of authority and producing a generation of young people, who, in their disillusion, were eager to discard indiscriminately the constrictions of the past. Before that, a sense of liberation had already been a feature of Edwardian life. The atmosphere of that brief era, in which Aldous Huxley grew to adulthood, was

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5 Stephen Spender, in J. Huxley (ed.), p. 19.

> electric with an exultant and slightly self-conscious sense of liberation - liberation, that is, from the stuffiness, the obscurantism, the false verities, the repressions and taboos now attributed, fairly or not, to the Victorian mind.[6]

The earlier stages of this period of change, approximately the last thirty years of Victoria's reign, far from being characterized by such a mood of exhilaration, were more sombre, even despairing in nature. It is a period described in some detail in John A. Lester Jr's Journey through Despair. Lester identifies a number of different factors in the vast changes which occurred in general perceptions of man's relationship to the universe, but notes the major impact of increasing scientific knowledge, an impact represented most powerfully by the publication, in 1859, of Charles Darwin's The Origin of Species.[7]

Darwin's work, although it did not so much introduce the concept of evolution to an unsuspecting public as synthesize many current scientific ideas (with crucial additions), yet had a profound impact on fundamental philosophical and religious assumptions: indeed, the major obstacle to its acceptance lay not in the scientific difficulties it presented, but in its radical philosophical message. Without extrapolating from reptiles to man, Darwin made it quite clear that man was subject to the same processes of change as the rest of animate nature, not, as had been generally supposed, created perfect in a universe shaped to meet his needs. The essence of The Origin's philosophical impact, according to Stephen Jay Gould, was threefold:

> First, Darwin argues that evolution has no purpose. Individuals struggle to increase the representation of their genes in future generations, and that is all ... Second, Darwin maintained that evolution has no direction; it does not

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6 Richard D. Altick, Victorian People and Ideas (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1973), p. 301.

7 John A. Lester Jr., Journey Through Despair 1880-1914 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), Ch. 2, pp. 37-52.

> inevitably lead to higher things. Organisms become better adapted to their local environment, and that is all ... Third, Darwin applied a consistent philosophy of materialism to his interpretation of nature. Matter is the ground of all existence; mind, spirit, and God as well, are just words that express the wondrous results of neuronal complexity.[8]

The religious ferment and confusion which characterized the latter part of the Victorian era was in large part due to these ideas, as they underwent the process of assimilation, passing from being the subject of controversy to becoming assumptions embedded in popular culture. The process was to be a long one, particularly since many of Darwin's observations remained unexplained for some time (Mendel's experiments were re-discovered after Darwin's death, and DNA was discovered more than a century after the publication of The Origin). Gould estimates that Darwin's theory of natural selection did not prevail, in a popular sense, until the 1940s.[9]

Gillian Beer uses an excerpt from Barry Barnes's Scientific Knowledge and Sociological Theory to describe the process by which a theory becomes an assumption:

> A successful model in science frequently moves from the status of an 'as if' theory to a 'real description'. From here it may develop into a cosmology, before eventual disintegration into a mass of techniques and procedures, wherein what were key theoretical conceptions become mere operators, the ontological status of which is scarcely given a thought (cf. force, temperature, frequency).[10]

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8 Stephen Jay Gould, Ever Since Darwin (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1979), pp. 12-13.

9 Gould, p. 11.

10 Gillian Beer, Darwin's Plots (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983), p. 4.

Using this model, the status of Darwin's theory may be usefully described during the early years of this century, including the 1920s, as being between cosmology and integration. In other words, although it had passed beyond its position of controversy, it did not yet prevail to the exclusion of the counter-assumptions which had been part of cultural life for many generations. Nor did it supply any basis for moral values to replace those it had undermined: as T.H. Huxley had argued in his Romanes Lecture of 1893, entitled 'Evolution and Ethics',[11] a basis for morality must be sought elsewhere than in the struggle for evolution.

Aldous Huxley, born in 1874, grew up in the later stages of 'the difficult flux of excitement, rebuttal, disconfirmation, pursuit, forgetfulness and analogy-making which together make up something of the process of assimilation'.[12] It is safe to assume that, in view of his family heritage, which included some of the most articulate and powerful argument on both sides of the evolutionary debate, he was more familiar than most people at the time with all the aspects of the controversy. His timely emergence as a writer after the conclusion of the 1914-18 War brought him the attention of a public eager to rid itself of the detritus of the past, but without much sense of direction for the future. Set partly in a rural Edwardian twilight, partly in the brash glare of modern city life, his early novels and stories gently at first, then more energetically, attacked the hypocrisy and pretensions of the past, particularly those to do with sexual morality and theology. In this way he earned himself the reputation of a liberating writer, and seemed to speak with the voice of the modern age. However, although his mockery of the values of the past was genuine enough, it was never as scathing or as bitter as his condemnation of the values of the post-war generation who read his works, and whose lives he depicted as trivial and empty of

11 See Cyril Bibby (ed.), The Essence of T.H. Huxley (London: Macmillan, 1967), pp. 156-158.

12 Beer, p. 6.

purpose. His criticism was directed at all sides, with a deflationary, negative humour which has been described as satirical (by Jerome Meckier, for instance),[13] but which Sean O'Faolain argues convincingly is better described as 'brilliant invective' because it does not operate from any discernible set of values:

> For the general conclusion, or moral, or practical lesson, or general principle of [Huxley's] thought or life view does not in the end emerge with anything like the clarity one expects from a man of such apparently superlative intelligence. All one can do is to induce it confusedly and unsatisfactorily from the underlying spirit of invective ... One is finally driven to conclude that all Huxley's intellectual paraphernalia conceals an intelligence at war with itself, or struggling vainly for a clear position from which to attack.[14]

For O'Faolain, the lack of 'a clear position' is a weakness. But it may be questioned whether this sense of 'an intelligence at war with itself' was not one of the very qualities that, in reflecting some of their own sense of conflict, aroused a sympathetic response from the readers of the 1920s. Although it seemed modern, it was a legacy of Victorian times: the conflict between tradition and scientific materialism had internalized to become part of the fabric of Huxley's personality. Throughout his fiction of this period, he demonstrated in different ways, which will be described in the course of this thesis, the struggle between contradictory assumptions as well as his search for a resolution. Even the hope for resolution, or the vision of universal harmony which motivated him, was a remnant of the Victorian era: it was such a vision that gave rise to the conception of evolution itself, a conception of order underlying profusion and change. It infuses the fiction of Dickens, Eliot and Hardy, as a sense of the inter-relationships and connections between people, places and times on a large scale. For Huxley, and the readers of

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13 Jerome Meckier, Aldous Huxley: Satire and Structure (London: Chatto and Windus, 1971).

14 Sean O'Faolain, The Vanishing Hero [1956] (Freeport: Books For Libraries Press, 1971), p. 9.

post-1918, the sense of belonging to a cosmic order was impossible to achieve. Brought up on moral laws for which the theological underpinnings had all but vanished, this generation could find no continuity betwen the physical laws of the universe and their inner, moral and spiritual lives.

One of the symptoms, perhaps the most characteristic, of this conflict in Huxley was a dualistic outlook on life which interpreted experience as separate, distinct, compartmentalized units. His characters, for instance, are types, usually associated with a particular 'set' of ideas or with aspects of his own personality. Huxley, aware of this trait in himself, if not its source, made it a feature of his writing to examine and analyze experience in arbitrary categories, calling it in one instance 'multiplicity'.

> The essence of the new way of looking at things is multiplicity. Multiplicity of eyes and multiplicity of aspects seen. For instance, one person interprets events in terms of bishops; another in terms of price of flannel camisoles ... and then there's the chemist, the biologist, the physicist, the historian. Each sees, professionally, a different aspect of the event, a different layer of reality. What I want to do is to look with all those eyes at once.[15]

Characters who represent aspects of Huxley himself - e.g. Calamy in Those Barren Leaves (Pt. V, Ch. 1, p. 307) often express this same sense of 'layers of reality' and search for a final level of reality which will embrace all others in a consciousness of unity, identity and wholeness. As a habitual way of perceiving, this separation of reality into different compartments relates closely to the sense of detachment to be found in all his writing, a quality often described as deficient sympathy or even callousness. Huxley commented on this in an interview:

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15 Aldous Huxley, Point Counter Point [1928] (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1955), p. 196.

> I don't feel myself to be extremely heartless. But the impression is partly my fault. I have a literary theory that I must have a two-angled vision of all my characters. You know how closely farce and tragedy are related. That's because the comic and the tragic are the same thing seen from two angles simultaneously. Either I try to show them both as they feel themselves to be and as others feel them to be; or else I try to give two rather similar characters who throw light on each other, two characters who share the same element, but in one it is made grotesque.[16]

The incapacity for seeing the total view is identified by Terry Eagleton, in Exiles and Emigrés,[17] as part of the increasing complexity of modern English society. Eagleton cites Huxley as a writer whose limitation lies in the fact that his 'external cynicism' and 'disgusted futility'[18] are symptoms of the disturbance of the times rather than a creative interpretation of them. Likewise, Stephen Spender, in The Struggle of the Modern[19] distinguishes between 'moderns', who have the ability to see life of the modern age as a whole, to address it with 'a sensibility committed to the present' and an 'intellect committed to criticising that present by applying to it ... [a] realisation of the past', and 'contemporaries' who, fully engaged with the modern world and its values, address it on its own terms (which does not preclude a critical perspective). Huxley can be seen by these criteria to be part of a long line of minor authors who may present a limited, or 'partial' view but who nevertheless have a distinctive literary contribution to make. As William Pritchard suggests, in Seeing Through Everything,[20] the novel is a form which does not necessarily benefit from a totalising view, as James Joyce's later work demonstrates. The partial view such as Huxley's has the potential to illuminate important, if limited, areas of experience with

16 Aldous Huxley, quoted from an interview in Donald Watt (ed.), Aldous Huxley: The Critical Heritage (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), p. 4.
17 Terry Eagleton, Exiles and Emigrés (London: Chatto and Windus, 1970).
18 Eagleton, p. 15.
19 Stephen Spender, The Struggle of the Modern (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1963), p. 78.
20 William Pritchard, Seeing Through Everything: English Writers 1918-1940 (London: Faber and Faber, 1977), Introduction.

an imaginative intensity which is all the more persuasive for the writer's one-sided attachment to his subject. This is particularly the case when this attachment is the result of assumptions the writer has inherited or absorbed from the surrounding society. Many contemporary readers, sharing the same set of loosely related assumptions, will reinforce the limitations of some of their perceptions, even if they are challenged in others: the later reader has an advantage in being able to disentangle more easily symptoms from interpretations, assumptions from belief or reason.

In this disentangling in Huxley's case, there is a danger in appearing to place overdue emphasis on Darwin and evolutionary theory as a single influence on him, and thus to deny the complex of factors within and without which make a writer. Should one consider, for instance, the influence of those other two giants of influence on the literary world, Marx and Freud, both of whom are much closer to Huxley in time? Without wishing to underestimate their influence, it must be said, firstly, that it exists, but is localized and distinct (much as Darwin's had been for Victorian writers) whereas Darwin's was pervasive and all the more powerful because it operated at the level of basic assumption rather than that of ideas; secondly, that both Marx and Freud themselves acknowledged the influence which Darwin had exerted on their own values and thought processes. His theory had reached into many areas of human enquiry apart from biology.

> The power of Darwin's writing in his culture is best understood when it is seen not as a single origin or 'source', but in its shifting relations to other areas of study. As Darwin's notebooks, reading lists, library and annotations all show, he was immensely alive to concurrent work in a range of disciplines, including not only other directly scientific work, but history, historiography, race theory, psychology and literature. The problems raised by his writing often manifest themselves most acutely when they are transferred into another field.[21]

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21 Beer, p. 10.

Through Marx, Freud and other thinkers and scientists from 1859 on, therefore, Darwin's influence was constantly reinforced by numerous interpretations and from a variety of sources, as part of the process of assimilation and disintegration described by Barnes (p.6).

As a last point on the question of Darwin's influence, it should be acknowledged that, while Darwin's contribution to the biological sciences was unique, and the result of many years of intense labour, what is now referred to loosely as Darwin's theory largely represents the endeavours of scientists preceding Darwin for many years. The theory of natural selection was simply the last, inevitable step needed, in a vast and accruing body of knowledge and observation, to synthesize and explain what was already all but obvious. As T.H. Huxley was said to have remarked: 'How stupid not to have thought of that before!'[22] When Darwin's theory is referred to, then, it is understood to include that seemingly irresistible momentum of scientific knowledge in the nineteenth century which culminated in the idea of one man, Darwin.

The following chapters show how Aldous Huxley's perceptions of the world were determined between 1921 and 1935, the period of his best writing, by unresolved conflicts in his assumptions. His writing was progressively characterised by a sense of struggle as he sought to reconcile an evolutionary model with a world he saw in terms of opposing concepts. Evolution carries unavoidable implications of change, process, transformation, chance, and, for many, development and progress (all elements which are vital to narrative). Huxley's novels function in terms of stasis, cycle, fixity, repetition - all elements which are antithetical to evolution. There

22 Jonathon Miller, Darwin for Beginners (London: Writers and Readers Publishing Cooperative, 1986), p. 3.

is in them a sense of helplessness and entrapment in time, situation and character which makes change (except for degeneration) impossible. Huxley's response to evolution was to fix on its materialist message, simultaneously insisting on it and resisting it: man's animal origins and certain mortality represented a constant preoccupation for him.

The account which follows focuses on this sense of resistance at the imaginative level to the fundamental processes of evolution, and to the unity underlying the cosmic process. It relates this to the corresponding determination to discover and experience that unity, as a central truth which transcends the physical nature of human existence. In the earliest novels, discussed in Chapter One, there was a growing sense of contradiction between Darwin's concept of the affinity between humanity and the rest of the natural world, and the meaninglessness which a purely material universe imposes on human existence. The sense of meaninglessness deepens, in the novels of the later twenties, discussed in Chapter Two, into a preoccupation with death, conclusion and collapse, or extinction. Then, corresponding with a change in the social mood of the thirties, the final two novels of the period under discussion represent a resolution of those contradictions which debarred a full realization of the evolving universe, freeing Huxley to incorporate a sense of the possibility of change and development into his perceptions of self and human nature. This development is the subject of Chapter Three, concluding the account of Huxley's own evolution as a writer representing the beginning of the modern, or technological era.

Huxley presumably continued to 'evolve' in personal terms, but (and this is the reason for concluding with the novel of 1935, Eyeless in Gaza), he did not do so

as an artist. In this lies an irony. When the sense of stasis and fixity dominated the mood of his novels, that is, in the 1920s, his writing was creatively enlivened by the sense of struggle, frustration and anger, always lightened by humour and nearly always vitally connected to the outward, social world. This was so even at the moments of his most negative and bleak perceptions, although with the progressively deepening sense of impasse in Point Counter Point there was little room for the comic energy which helped to provide momentum in his writing. With the freedom from conflict that occurred in the early thirties, providing him with a firm philosophical base, and freeing him from a sense of inner and outer fragmentation and alienation, there was an apparent diminution of creative energy. His writing became more introverted, mystical and didactic, less to do with art, more with education of a disenchanted and dwindling public.

There is little critical disagreement on Huxley's shortcomings as a novel writer: his detachment, discussed earlier, his oversimplification, and his intrusive didacticism are all obvious difficulties. There is less agreement however, on his literary merit apart from these 'flaws' and any discussion on the subject tends to centre around the question of genre and tradition. C.S. Ferns argues persuasively that, where Huxley is judged harshly, it is from the perspective of the James-Conrad tradition - that this perspective is inadequate because it fails to take account of the fragmentation of the novel form which has occurred with rapid social change, and that continuing readerly interest in Huxley indicates strengths which the critic habitually neglects.[23] Finally though, Ferns is unable to suggest himself what the criteria for assessing Huxley should be, and is unable to assert, by any standards, that Huxley is more than a minor, and flawed writer. Nevertheless, he believes, Huxley holds rewards for the reader and critic who are prepared to see him as part of the process of

23 C.S. Ferns, Aldous Huxley (London: The Athlone Press, 1980), Ch. 1.

the novel described by George Steiner as 'the decline of [middle-class] ideals and habits into a phase of crisis and partial rout, [in which] the genre is losing much of its vital being.'[24] Even more pertinently to the subject of this thesis, he laments the lack of critical attention to locating Huxley in his period, to the way he wrote. It is a lack which the discussion which follows attempts to rectify, by examining the influence of prevailing beliefs and values on Huxley, and his writing as a reflection of changing responses to one of the most important, if not revolutionary, of those influences, Darwin's theory of evolution.

24 George Steiner, quoted in Ferns, p. 19.

CHAPTER 1 AN INEXTRICABLE WEB OF AFFINITIES

> A gate slammed; there was a sound of heavy footsteps.
> 'Morning, Rowley!' said Henry Wimbush.
> 'Morning, sir,' old Rowley answered. He was the most venerable of the labourers on the farm - a tall, solid man, still unbent, with grey side-whiskers and a steep, dignified profile. Grave, weighty in his manner, splendidly respectable, Rowley had an air of a great English statesman of the mid nineteenth century. He halted on the outskirts of the group, and for a moment they all looked at the pigs in a silence that was only broken by the sound of grunting or the squelch of a sharp hoof in the mire. Rowley turned at last, slowly and ponderously and nobly, as he did everything, and addressed himself to Henry Wimbush.
> 'Look at them, sir,' he said, with a motion of his hand towards the wallowing swine. 'Rightly is they called pigs.'
> 'Rightly indeed,' Mr Wimbush agreed.
> 'I am abashed by that man,' said Mr Scogan, as old Rowley plodded off slowly and with dignity. 'What wisdom, what judgement, what a sense of values! "Rightly are they called swine." Yes. And I wish I could, with as much justice, say, "Rightly we are called men."'[1]

Written by anyone other than Aldous Huxley, this could easily be read simply as a joke about language. Here, as part of an opening sequence from Crome Yellow, in which a group of young, urban house-guests take a tour of their host's farm, it also represents a theme which preoccupied Huxley for most of his life.

Old Rowley is part of the traditional way of life represented by Crome, based on the universally-acknowledged hierarchies of the natural and social worlds. Rowley's certain sense of his position within those hierarchies, felt to be associated with the solidity and gravity of his presence, is expressed equally by his dignified deference to Wimbush and his consignment of the pigs to the lowlier ranks of creation. Scogan's 'abashment' expresses the confusion of the modern age over what it means to be human. In the light of modern scientific knowledge about the true

1 Aldous Huxley, Crome Yellow [1921] (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1936), p. 26.

relationship of man to the other members of the animal kingdom and to the whole material universe, there is an uncomfortable recognition of the questionable wisdom in placing man at the head of the traditional natural hierarchy, or even, Huxley suggests, above pigs.

The effect of nineteenth-century evolutionary thought on the traditional and broadly universally-accepted myths of hierarchy was to undermine the concept of creation as an ordered chain of being, and to substitute the concept of 'an inextricable web of affinities', binding all forms of life together in universal kinship. Darwin, whose phrase this is, also used the image of the Tree of Life, 'which fills with its dead and broken branches the crust of the earth, and covers the surface with its ever branching and beautiful ramifications.'[2] The implication of this image is that the universe functions as a living organism, each single part being in harmonious interaction with the rest. For many, especially those conscious of the intellectual and moral restrictions of established religion, these ideas were uplifting and liberating. As Edward Dowden wrote,

> It may be questioned whether man's dignity is not more exalted by conceiving him as part - a real though so small a part - of a great Cosmos, infinitely greater than he, than by placing him as king upon the throne of creation.[3]

Others were not ready to interpret evolutionary theory in so positive a light, feeling that such a close affinity with the natural world was degrading, imprisoning mankind in a materialistic, deterministic universe, and exiling him from religious faith and ethical processes. Their feeling is perhaps encapsulated by John A. Lester

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2 Charles Darwin, The Origin of Species By Means of Natural Selection ed. J.W. Burrow [1859] (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 172.

3 Quoted by T.Cosslett, The Scientific Movement and Victorian Literature (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1982), p. 19.

Jr, who in Journey Through Despair describes the initial impact of Darwin's theory thus:

> Darwin left no room whatever for purpose in the world, human or divine, or for any free will to pursue such a purpose if there was one. He posited only, in the infinitely remote past, an initiating First Cause. Thereafter, the impersonal, predetermined, external forces of the material world shaped all that man has become and can be. There was no room for humanity, only brute struggle for survival, and survival only of the fittest.[4]

In the later years of the 1880-1914 period, during which the impact of Darwin was at its height, there was a shift of interest to the element of chance inherent in his theory, combining with findings in other areas of science to produce a preoccupation with relativity and flux, and an escape from the tyranny of determinism and scientific reason. Such a preoccupation did nothing, however, to lessen the prevailing feelings of human alienation and insignificance in a vast, impersonal universe. It may even have intensified them, both by undermining the conception of absolute truth and by acknowledging the subjective nature of reality.

'By 1914, Darwinian evolution had clearly won the day',[5] and its key concepts, such as Nature's 'web of affinities' passed from a position of public controversy to become a basic cultural assumption about the relationship of man to the cosmos (thereby becoming even more influential than before). But Huxley's fictional writings over the years 1921-35 suggest that the controversy continued at the imaginative level. It is apparent from his writing that, for him at least, man's affinity with the animate and inanimate world of nature was a disturbing assumption, firstly, because it confirmed him as an isolated being in a non-human relativistic world,

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4 Lester, p. 41.
5 Lester, p. 43.

denying him the spiritual affinity with the absolute that he craved; secondly, because he felt it condemned man to a purely physiological existence, subject to death and even extinction like all other life forms, making a mockery of all his spiritual and intellectual aspirations. I will discuss the second of these in Chapter 2. In this chapter I hope to show how his earliest novels, Crome Yellow (1921) and Antic Hay (1927), express his dawning sense of isolation of the individual in a Darwinian world of affinity, and to describe his attempt to confront that isolation and deal with it creatively.

Crome Yellow is pervaded by a sense of nostalgia for the bygone Edwardian era (but a nostalgia rescued from sentimentality by a balancing irony). A central characteristic of the world at Crome is felt to be the harmonious relationship between its inhabitants (human and animal, gentry and villager) and their physical surroundings (natural and man-made). It is a living, organic community, self-contained and separate from the other, urban reality of Denis and his fellow guests, so separate that it is felt to be distanced by time as well as space. The train journey which conveys Denis to Crome has something of the character of a trip in a time machine, carrying him back to the pastoral past, and obliterating the urban, modern reality of his life.[6] The life of the city is not recognized at Crome:

> 'How's London been since I went away?' Anne inquired from the depth of her chair.
>
> The moment had come; the tremendously amusing narrative was waiting for utterance. 'Well,' said Denis, smiling happily, 'to begin with...'
>
> 'Has Priscilla told you of our great antiquarian find?' Henry Wimbush leaned forward; the most promising of buds was nipped.
>
> 'To begin with,' said Denis desperately, 'there was the Ballet...'

6 Train journeys in Huxley's novels often represent returning to the past - Gumbril's train journey to Emily's cottage (Antic Hay), for instance, or Anthony Beavis's to his mother's funeral (Eyeless in Gaza).

> 'Last week,' Mr Wimbush went on softly and implacably, 'we dug up fifty yards of oaken drain-pipes; just tree trunks with a hole bored through the middle. Very interesting indeed. Whether they were laid down by the monks in the fifteenth century, or whether...' (pp. 16-17)

Insisting on its own reality, in which the present is continuous with the past, Crome is felt to be robust and enduring, but it is also fragile in its whimsical, irrelevant remoteness from the pressures of the outside world to which the return train journey must be taken. So, while it represents a picture of affinity between man and man, man and nature, it is essentially an innocent, pre-Darwinian affinity, based on the conception of the world as ordered and circumscribed by benevolent, divine law. It has not yet confronted the vastness of the Darwinian landscape of which it is so small a part. At the local church, even Mr Bodiham's urgent references to the immediate international political scene or the coming apocalypse find no recognition or response from the congregation. In this way, Crome bears an inverted resemblance to Eden, since the security of this world is based on a knowledge of good and evil, whereas the post-Darwinian world of the city is a wilderness where there are no absolutes or certainties.

Not having recognized the vastly expanded perspectives of the modern scientific world, Henry Wimbush, in his attachment to his home and its history, is seen to be quaintly innocent - enviable, perhaps, in his self-containment within that small, predictable world, but vulnerable in his unawareness of the fairy-tale, subjective unreality of it all.

> The contemplation of the glories of the past always evoked in Henry Wimbush a certain enthusiasm. Under the grey bowler his face worked and glowed as he spoke. The thought of these vanished privies moved him profoundly. He ceased to speak; the light gradually died out of his face, and it became once more the replica of the grave, polite hat which shaded it. There was a long silence; the same gently melancholy thoughts seemed to possess the mind of

> each of them. Permanence, transience - Sir Ferdinando and his privies were gone, Crome still stood. How brightly the sun shone and how inevitable was death! The ways of God were strange; the ways of man were stranger still. (p. 57)

Henry is in a position not unlike that of his tiny ancestor, Sir Hercules, who, it is recounted (in Ch.13), constructed a world in miniature to match his own size, only to have the crude but larger external reality break in on him and, inevitably, destroy his delicate and beautiful creation. This poignant little story suggests the vulnerability of those whose world is constructed on the small, human scale. The threatening vastness of the Darwinian universe must somehow be acknowledged and confronted by those who wish to survive in the modern world.

The sense of this universe, vast in time and space, pressing in on the human-scale world is, because of its threatening, overwhelming nature, expressed in Crome Yellow and Antic Hay not as a new sense of universal relationship, but as estrangement, detachment, loneliness and disorientation. Denis, the central character in Crome, is central not only because he is isolated or separate, but because as a member of the modern world, he is aware that he is. All the other characters are perceived as being isolated too, but foster an illusion of belonging and relating to the world by preoccupying themselves with the tangible, physical and immediate, distracting themselves from their actual separateness. From the detached perspective that the novel takes, their preoccupations are mocked as the illusory constructions they are: Henry's drain-pipes and privies, for instance, Priscilla's gambling and spirit games, Scogan's rationalist fantasies.

Denis is doubly isolated, not only by his self-consciousness, but by his youth, education and intellectual nature. Colin Wilson, seeing him as the 'first incarnation of [Huxley's] Chinless Intelligent hero', feels that he 'does not seem to enjoy his creator's sympathy; he gets a raw deal from every angle.'[7] But Denis's ineffectuality is felt to be caused by an environment that is not, as the world of Crome suggests, ordered and predictable, but fickle and uncontrollable. He is not mocked for his ineffectuality because he lacks his creator's sympathy; rather, by being put into a larger, comic perspective, he is reduced to what Huxley feels are realistic proportions, relative to the vast scale of the natural universe. Denis's inflating of his own internal dilemmas is as self-delusive as Henry Wimbush's belief in the importance of Crome's history. Denis is aware of his separateness, but rather than accepting it as a condition of human existence, tries to re-enter the romantic world of the past.

Denis is involved repeatedly in situations which demonstrate his isolation: Henry Wimbush's refusal, quoted earlier, to recognize Denis's separate existence, Anne's total inability to understand his intellectual sufferings (pp. 22-23), the conversation with Jenny which causes him to reflect that 'we are all parallel straight lines' (p. 19). It is not until he reads Jenny's red notebook that he is confronted with the fact of another's separate existence and perceptions and experiences the pain and humiliating helplessness of himself as object, ruthlessly judged by 'the vast conscious world'.

> No, the distressing thing wasn't Jenny herself; it was what she and the phenomenon of her red book represented, what they stood for and concretely symbolized. They represented all the vast conscious world of men outside himself; they symbolized something that in his studious solitariness he was apt not to believe in. He could stand at Piccadilly Circus, could watch the crowds shuffle past, and still imagine himself the one fully conscious, intelligent,

7 Colin Wilson, The Strength to Dream (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1962), p. 187.

> individual being among all those thousands. It seemed, somehow, impossible that other people should be in their way as elaborate and complete as he in his. Impossible; and yet, periodically he would make some painful discovery about the external world and the horrible reality of its consciousness and its intelligence. The red notebook was one of these discoveries, a footprint in the sand. It put beyond a doubt the fact that the outer world really existed. (pp. 137-8)

Jenny has served one of the true functions of the artist in challenging Denis's narrow reality by revealing an infinitely wider one, forcing him to see his separateness, but implicitly holding the promise like 'a footprint in the sand', of relationship in a new and unknown world, of choice and change.

It is this promise which makes him attempt to share his feelings with Mary, whom he has hitherto steadfastly refused to recognize (p. 139). The results are disastrous, even if comical, only confirming his isolation. In spite of the lesson of the red notebook, he, like Mary,is still unable to sustain the recognition of the reality of another's consciousness. Like the peacocks, locked into their own nature (p.138), he cannot profit from the glimmerings of the wider reality he has perceived.

Anne Wimbush is another who offers him these glimmerings of reality along the way. She faces him with a tangible external reality which will not conform to his pre-conceptions. Thus his romantic vision of their relationship is forced to reckon with the fact that he is unable to carry her over the darkened lawn when she falls and twists her ankle (p. 95). When Anne dances with Gombauld (in chs. 10 and 28), she is perceived as being part of a harmony which embraces and reconciles opposites in a 'universal concert'. Music and dance are used here to symbolize a universal affinity which transcends the human even though it must be experienced through relationship:

> But the sight of Anne and Gombauld swimming past - Anne with her eyes almost shut and sleeping, as it were, on the sustaining wings of movement and music - dissipated these preoccupations. Male and female created He them...There they were, Anne and Gombauld, and a hundred couples more - all stepping harmoniously together to the old tune of Male and Female created He them. But Denis sat apart; he alone lacked his complementary opposite. They were all coupled but he; but he... (pp. 160-161)

In spite of the suggestions of this passage and her consciousness of the power that her sexuality gives her, Anne is as aloof to Gombauld's Latin attractions as she is to Denis's hesitant importuning. Her face is described as 'a dollish mask' (p. 16), a hint of Huxley's later interest in masks, illusion and identity, emphasizing her enigmatic, mysterious nature. In her ambivalent behaviour, alluring and unattainable, intimate and aloof, she is predecessor to many of Huxley's female characters, but Anne's portrayal, unlike the later ones, is generous, and not tinged with bitterness, disillusionment or hatred. She has a pragmatic, if unimaginative, approach to life, in healthy contrast to Denis's.

> 'Why can't you just take things for granted and as they come?' she asked. 'It's so much simpler.'
> 'Of course it is,' said Denis. 'But it's a lesson to be learnt gradually. There are the twenty tons of ratiocination to be got rid of first.'
> 'I've always taken things as they come,' said Anne. 'It seems so obvious. One enjoys the pleasant things, avoids the nasty ones. There's nothing more to be said.'
> 'Nothing - for you. But, then, you were born a pagan; I am trying laboriously to make myself one. I can take nothing for granted, I can enjoy nothing as it comes along.' (p.23)

As an uneducated 'pagan', Anne has retained her enviable, sensuous relationship to the world, untroubled by such intellectual concepts as truth, goodness or divinity. But then, she inhabits the pastoral world of Crome, where it is still possible to 'enjoy the pleasant things, avoid the nasty ones': her successor, Myra Viveash in Antic Hay,is unable to adopt so simple a philosophy.

If Anne forms one contrast to Denis's propensity for 'ratiocination', Ivor Lombard is another, and a more extreme one. Where Anne, for all her modernity, is still related closely to the traditional past, through her connections with Crome, Ivor is a creature of the modern age, like those of the post-war generation who are the subject of Martin Green's Children of the Sun[8], free of all conflicting moralities, passions, commitments and family ties, an independent spirit who rejects all the values of the preceding generation. The portrait is an engaging one, its satirical edge softened by a sense of delight in Ivor's irresponsibility and theatricality:

> Nature and fortune had vied with one another in heaping on Ivor Lombard all their choicest gifts. He had wealth and he was perfectly independent. He was good-looking, possessed an irresistible charm of manner, and was the hero of more amorous successes than he could well remember. His accomplishments were extraordinary for their number and variety. He had a beautiful untrained tenor voice; he could improvise, with a startling brilliance, rapidly and loudly, on the piano. He was a good amateur medium and telepathist, and had a considerable first-hand knowledge of the next world. He could write rhymed verses with an extraordinary rapidity. For painting symbolical pictures he had a dashing style, and if the drawing was sometimes a little weak, the colour was always pyrotechnical. He excelled in amateur theatricals and, when occasion offered, he could cook with genius. He resembled Shakespeare in knowing little Latin and less Greek. For a mind like his, education seemed supererogatory. Training would only have destroyed his natural aptitudes. (p. 90)

Far from being seen as deserving of 'a bad end', as he doubtless would have been in Huxley's later novels, Ivor flourishes, blessed by his happy ignorance of the philosophical or scientific issues which preoccupy the more serious-minded.

> Ivor had his feather, a long-lashed eye of purple and green, of blue and gold. He handed it to his companion.
> 'An angel's feather,' he said.
> Mary looked at it for a moment, gravely and intently. Her purple pyjamas clothed her with an ampleness that hid the lines of her body; she looked like some large, comfortable, unjointed toy, a sort of Teddy bear - but a Teddy

8 Martin Green, Children of the Sun (London: Constable, 1977).

> bear with an angel's head, pink cheeks, and hair like a bell of gold. An angel's face, the feather of an angel's wing...Somehow the whole atmosphere of this sunrise was rather angelic.
> 'It's extraordinary to think of sexual selection,' she said at last, looking up from her contemplation of the miraculous feather.
> 'Extraordinary!' Ivor echoed. 'I select you, you select me. What luck!' (p. 115)

Ivor generates so much fun that it is possible to overlook his more disquieting features; not only that, but he is such a satisfactory foil to Mary's earnestness and Denis's self-consciousness that one does not want to prod at his colourful but brittle surface in the attempt to extract much significance from him. But he is quite clearly a forerunner to the restless, nervously energetic, clever, younger generation of Antic Hay (and the Bright Young Things of Evelyn Waugh's Vile Bodies). He embodies the freedom and studied innocence of the youth of the twenties, but points to the spiritual emptiness inherent in that freedom. He holds the material world in the palm of his hand, but, as a manifestation of the moral wilderness which exists outside Crome, he foreshadows Gerry Watchett, the opportunistic, cynical exploiter of Eyeless in Gaza, written fifteen years later.

While Ivor's presence is a mocking comment on Denis, therefore, it is also a recognition of Denis's place within society. Next to Ivor, Denis is clearly seen to be part of a cultural continuity, despite his sense of alienation, through his love of language and the literary heritage which, through the education he decries, has become an integral part of his consciousness and perceptions:

> He emerged once more into the sunshine. The pool lay before him, reflecting in its bronze mirror the blue and various green of the summer day. Looking at it, he thought of Anne's bare arms and seal-sleek bathing-dress, her moving knees and feet.
> 'And little Luce with the white legs,
> And bouncing Barbary...'

> Oh, these rags and tags of other people's making! Would he ever be able to call his brain his own? Was there, indeed, anything in it that was truly his own, or was it simply an education? (p. 138)

However, the cultural past to which he belongs, associated with the dream-like world of Crome, is felt to be disintegrating, and cannot sustain him. Helplessly, he is propelled into the unknown future.

> The car was at the door - the hearse. The whole party had assembled to see him go. Good-bye. Mechanically he tapped the barometer that hung in the porch; the needle stirred perceptibly to the left. A sudden smile lighted up his lugubrious face.
>
> '"It sinks, and I am ready to depart,"' he said, quoting Landor with an exquisite aptness. He looked quickly round from face to face. Nobody had noticed. He climbed into the hearse. (pp. 173-174)

The mocking tone of the conclusion does not entirely hide the note of regret at the loss of something loved and irreplaceable. There is a suggestion that Crome is exchanging its living physical reality for a literary one which Denis carries with him on the hearse to the modern world. The old order of affinities which have supported life at Crome have faded away in the face of the wider world revealed by science.

Crome represents an existence of ease and innocence which, as he prophesied in the Landor quotation, Huxley was never to recapture in his later novels. The same may be said of the generous spirit and lightness of touch which he employed to present it. Little more than a nostalgic, backward glance at a world of human and natural affinities in an age of lost innocence, its darker undertones draw a parallel between Denis's painful and reluctant coming-of-age, and the new consciousness of the post-Darwinian era: the term 'human' must be re-defined to fit a small, insignificant niche in the vast, impersonal universe revealed by Mr Scogan's speech

on human suffering (pp. 88-89). The concept of affinity must also be redefined to extend beyond the merely human frame of reference. The terms of the search have been identified: the location of the search is to be the modern city of Antic Hay.

The contrast between these two novels is immediately apparent in the way their characters approach the future. Denis's approach in Crome is tentative, reluctant, regretful. Gumbril junior, in the opening chapters of Antic Hay, true to the spirit of the title, leaps into the future with a sense of release and optimism, leaving behind a past felt to be detested for its repressive and irrelevant constraints.

Gumbril and his friends might have been created expressly to illustrate the validity of Oscar Wilde's remark. 'The first duty in life is to assume a pose; what the second one is, no-one has yet found out.'[9] Older than Denis Stone, they nevertheless have a very youthful preoccupation with their own identity and image, combined with a zestful sense of life as a game that can be mastered by acquiring the right mask. More than any other of his novels, Antic Hay has identified Huxley's name as a novelist with the gaiety and frivolity of the twenties. But there is an urgency and restlessness underlying the apparent gaiety which creates a resonant note: the adoption of a mask, however cynical or hedonistic, does not fully disguise a search for values and truths that transcend both Darwinian materialism and Christian concepts of good and evil. Theodore Gumbril expresses his dilemma early in the opening chapter:

> She had just been diligently good, that was all. Good; good? It was a word people only used nowadays with a kind of deprecating humorousness. Good. Beyond good and evil? We are all that nowadays. Or merely below them,

9 Quoted in Lester, p. 140.

> like earwigs? I glory in the name of earwig. Gumbril made a mental gesture and inwardly declaimed.[10]

At the end of the novel, Gumbril (like Scogan with the pigs) is still attempting to distinguish the essential difference between a human and an earwig.

The distinction is more difficult to make, because in Antic Hay it is the lack of inter-relationships which characterizes society. Huxley's sense of London is one of disparity and dislocation. Although he strives at times to create a picture of an interacting community of diverse but related groups, the overwhelming sense is of completely separate, independently-operating individuals and groups, unable to establish connections on the most basic of issues. Thus the derelict couple's woes at Hyde Park Corner form an inharmonious counterpoint to the trivial philosophizing of the young revellers, and even Gumbril's sympathy is mocked:

> 'It's appalling, it's horrible,' said Gumbril at last, after a long, long silence, during which he had, indeed, been relishing to the full the horror of it all. Life, don't you know.' (p. 67)

So the sense of natural affinity, of people being part of a web of inter-connecting relationships, is here much diminished, felt to be under pressure not so much from the external features of an increasingly urbanized society (as Gissing's London society is in New Grub Street), but from Huxley's own internal strains. This is not industrial London, or a London of the masses, but a city of excitement, 'Henry

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10 Aldous Huxley, Antic Hay [1923] (St. Albans: Triad/Panther Books, 1977), p. 8.

James's London possessed by carnival'.[11] Despite Huxley's earnest rejoinder to his father's disapproval of the novel - that it was a book 'written by a member of what I may call the war-generation for others of his kind' intended to reflect 'the violent disruptions of almost all the standards, conventions and values current in the previous epoch'[12] - the war is only the dimmest of shadows here, the apparent cause of an 'ennui' and disillusionment which is more like an amusing game than a genuine spiritual malaise. The real subject of the novel, that is, the one underlying the exposure of hypocrisy which takes up so much of the novel's energy, is the disintegration of the affinities, or bonds, that have held society together in preceding generations. The standpoint from which this disintegration is viewed is unstable, alternately one of excited pleasure or cynical disgust. (The treatment of Rosie Shearwater is a particularly good example of this instability.) The duality of vision which was to become so prominent a feature of Huxley's writing begins to make its presence felt in this novel, through its disparateness and lack of coherence. There may seem to be a danger, as with Crome, of imposing too heavy a burden of expectations on such a light and comic structure. But the comedy is integral to the serious underlying intent, representing the pleasures of a tangible present with which this society seeks to replace the traditional moral and spiritual certainties.

To the extent that the affinities of the old society still exist, they are felt in the filial bonds of the Gumbril family, and to a lesser extent, the Porteous family. Highly unusual, in Huxley's fiction, in their benevolent paternity, Gumbril and Porteous senior exist largely to create approbation for the values of the older generation, which, through its belief in good and evil, can live a life of order and proportion, with clear

11 Evelyn Waugh, 'Youth at the Helm and Pleasure at the Prow: Antic Hay' in Robert E. Kuehn (ed.), Aldous Huxley: A Collection of Critical Essays (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1974), p. 19.

12 Grover Smith (ed.), Letters of Aldous Huxley (London: Chatto and Windus, 1969), No. 210, p. 224.

moral priorities by which to act and judge. The members of the younger generation, like Theodore Gumbril, have no such belief, therefore, it is suggested, no proportion or structure to their lives - on the contrary, they seek out and cultivate extreme and theatrical attitudes. Their departure from the older values, with their search for new ones, undermines the traditional family affiliations with which the older men are associated; Gumbril and Porteous senior, although affirmed as worthy and admirable, are not perceived as survivors in the modern world. The value of family bonds lies open to question when there are no marriages or children among the younger people. However, positive and nostalgic suggestions of the value of family affinities linger through the novel.

Beyond these, there is the network of the commercial world, of which Bojanus and Boldero are a part, and temporarily, Theodore. United tenuously by their desire to make money, they are seen to exist by their knowledge and exploitation of the interdependencies of the class system. Far from being oppressed by their dependence on the affluent and powerful, both Bojanus and Boldero have a robust appreciation of their own abilities to manipulate them to their own ends - there is no feeling here of the bitterness, hostility and fear that mark the class interactions of Point Counter Point. However, it is a world which has only marginal influence on the life of the novel: Theodore is the only character we see entering it, and he only briefly. Despite the length of this section, there is no felt connection between the people of the commercial world and the society which depends on them. Moreover, it represents a backward-looking view of commercial life of the early century: the susceptibility of the newly literate to manipulation, for instance, was a common theme in Edwardian times. As a result, the commercial world of the novel, rather than reinforcing a positive image of society as it seems to have been intended to do, inadvertently creates a sense of disorientation. It presents an isolated fragment from another,

disconnected world, certainly one which offers an alternative frame of values to that of church and school, but not one which offers any pertinent comment on the urban scene of the post-war generation.

Similarly, the descriptions of the physical environment of London present an idyllic view of affinity between the natural and the man-made which is like a glance backwards to a vanished past:

> The sun was shining and at the end of the street between the houses the sky was blue. Gauzily the distances faded to a soft, rich indistinctness; there were veils of golden muslin thickening down the length of every vista. On the trees in the Hanover Square gardens the young leaves were still so green that they seemed to be alight, green fire, and the sooty trunks looked blacker and dirtier than ever. It would have been a pleasant and apposite thing if a cuckoo had started calling. But though the cuckoo was silent it was a happy day. A day, Gumbril reflected, as he strolled idly along, to be in love.

> From the world of tailors Gumbril passed into that of the artificial-pearl merchants, and with a still keener appreciation of the amorous qualities of this clear spring day, he began a leisured march along the perfumed pavements of Bond Street. (p. 36)

This has the sound of an urban pastoral, with its springtime promises of pleasure and unexplored delights. The city is felt as a welcoming, convivial, exciting environment, a young person's natural habitat. The blackened trunks register the grubby reality of the city, but serve to intensify the colour rather than diminish it. Suggestions of sexual seduction abound, with a delight and sensuousness which is rare in Huxley's writing.

> He watched her as she crossed the dirty street, placing her feet with a meticulous precision one after the other in the same straight line, as though she were treading a knife edge between goodness only knew what invisible gulfs. Floating she seemed to go, with a little spring at every step and the skirt

> of her summery dress - white it was, with a florid pattern printed in black all over it - blowing airily out around her swaying march. (p. 72)

Gumbril senior also finds links with the natural world in the heart of the city. His delight in the flocks of starlings outside his window is an essential part of his vitality, and it supports his confident sense of an external reality which operates quite independently of himself, but to which he nevertheless belongs. It is this confidence from which his creative energy is felt to spring, giving to his art the life that Lypiatt's lacks.

In spite of these suggestions of affinities and relationships, however, there are some others - equally strong, and working cumulatively through the novel - of brittleness and breakdown, converting the early promise and energy to an empty restlessness. Most obviously these lie in the main characters, in their relationships (or lack of them) and their need to adopt poses, masks or dramatic attitudes.

The 'masked' character recurs in Huxley's fiction of the period (e.g. Spandrell, in Point Counter Point, Staithes in Eyeless in Gaza) but in this novel nearly all the main characters, including the 'hero' Theodore Gumbril for much of the time, address the world from behind an assumed personality. A fascination with mask, or double personality, had been common in the literature of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Oscar Wilde's The Picture of Dorian Gray, Stevenson's Dr. Jeckyll and Mr. Hyde and Conrad's The Secret Sharer are examples of this fascination. Lester sums up the purpose of the mask and relates it to the philosophical climate of the time:

> Thus the use of the mask thrived in the imagination of these decades. (1) as protective shell to a wounded sensibility, (2) as a projective conception of the varieties and heights of being which man might achieve, and (3) as an aesthetic means for striking an aesthetic attitude, calm, fixed, serene, and outside the flux of time. In each of these roles the mask reveals its origin and the need of the imagination to cope with a world which left no place for human significance.[13]

Gumbril, in Antic Hay, indicates explicitly his reason for adopting the 'mask' of the Complete Man. It corresponds to the second of the uses above and demonstrates Huxley's growing interest in the relationship between the real and the assumed: Gumbril is more completely himself, disguised, than when he appears as Gumbril. Similarly, many of the other characters assume a reality in their posturing that is shown to compare favourably with what underlies their theatricality - their lives are transformed into something exciting, civilized, colourful, amusing. It is interesting to compare this playing of roles with Denis's timidity and self-consciousness in Crome Yellow. Denis is alone in a world where all others know their parts and play them consistently, secure in their relationship to their cultural and physical environment. Their sense of self is perceived to be inseparable from the face they present.

Denis, however, has a very unstable sense of self. He attempts to play parts, but they usually collapse when others refuse to recognize or accept them (e.g. the porter, p.6; Anne, pp. 20-21). This instability in Denis is part of a general uncertainty about his own perceptions and experiences and their relation to others', and about where he belongs in this world of 'parallel lines' (p. 19) or unrelated beings. Part of the significance of the discovery of the red note book is the realization that he is, in others' eyes, playing the part of the Callow, Romantic Youth; the extension of this

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13 Lester, p. 148.

realization, that he might play other parts to the world (as Ivor does so well) does not occur to him. It comes easily to Gumbril however, and much of Antic Hay is an exploitation of the nature and possibilities of theatre, or mask, relating to the world at large.

Part of Huxley's interest in the subject seems to derive from his increasingly dualistic perception of human nature; the sense that the civilized front which people present covers both a powerful beast and a vulnerable child not far below the surface. The beast relates to man's evolutionary origins and is motivated by the drive to procreate and to survive. The vulnerable child relates to the emotions, perceived as false, treacherous, weak. Both these aspects lurk within and behind the masks of the characters Gumbril, Lypiatt, Coleman, Mercaptan, Rosie and Myra: the roles they play are socially accepted disguises which occasionally slip to reveal, in Coleman's case, a blood-spattered rapist, in Lypiatt's a weak, petulant, self-indulgent adolescent. The mask transforms qualities that threaten the individual and society into what seem simultaneously more and less human qualities; Huxley is undecided on the question.

Whereas the dramatic nature of Antic Hay could offer a developing, expanding sense of the possibilities of human existence, it finally abandons the positive, buoyant mood of the opening to adopt one of pessimism, with a focus on the bestiality, futility and meaninglessness of life. The growing prominence of this mood corresponds with the increasingly frequent presence of Myra Viveash, who, at the end of the novel, is almost the principal character.

Myra represents an intensification of Anne Wimbush's personality, an extreme and theatrical projection of the qualities which distinguish Anne. Principally,

they are a series of contradictions which reflect the hero's, and Huxley's, uncertainties - Myra combines associations of sexuality and death, energy and inertia, chastity and promiscuity. The imagery with which she is associated suggests the sadness and transience of the natural world, with glimpses through her predatoriness of an archaic earth goddess who survives by consuming men. Certainly Gumbril, Lypiatt and Shearwater disintegrate under her influence, all perceived as helpless victims of her mysterious sexual power. There is a suggestion of the author's self-pity here which weakens the final chapters of the novel by undermining the credibility of the characters.

Huxley's unwillingness to adopt a point-of-view further weakens the ending. Attitudes of melancholy, despair and bitterness prevail plentifully, but are simultaneously mocked, so that one wonders whether they represent simply more theatrical mask in the game of being young in the 1920s, or whether they represent Huxley's attempt to disguise his uncertainty. In his chapter on Huxley in The Vanishing Hero, O'Faolain says of that time,

> It was natural then to be sorry for oneself, to express one's disgust with the wearisome condition of humanity either by being puritanical or the reckless opposite, one's disbelief in society by denying sin and misdoubting virtue, one's contempt for traditional solutions by posing abstract questions to which there was no real answer, to take refuge in aestheticism, to show one's distrust of all large political conclusions by finding the hero type only in the lone wolf ... because honesty and idealism could not have validity except for the very few.[14]

which suggests a certain self-indulgence and escapism endemic in the spirit of the times. However, whether Huxley is playing a game with his reader or not, his refusal to adopt a firm viewpoint is most usefully interpreted as his closeness to that

14 O'Faolain, p. 22.

prevailing insecurity of outlook which resulted from a rapidly changing conception of man.

It is possible to view Antic Hay as a carnival mask (to borrow Waugh's description) itself, used by Huxley to protect his deepest fears from scrutiny, or to extend and develop his abilities free of the limitations of his own personality. But like his characters, Huxley does little in the way of development in the course of the novel; in fact there is little more in terms of insight into human nature than there was in Crome. Moreover, what was said in that novel delicately and gracefully is repeated here more loudly and crudely. The impasse which increasingly characterizes the novels of this period begins to be obvious here. At the same time, there is an undeniable deepening of the concerns that find expression in Crome, and the one that finds the most urgent expression is the prominence of death in a material universe.

Myra is the figure most closely associated with death, and has already been discussed in her implied relation to the natural world. She represents the simultaneously absurd and tragic side of evolutionary theory (for instance, in her 'dying laugh'), ridiculing the traditional assumption that man is made in God's image, and lamenting the futility of individual human life and death. Her never-ending taxi ride, devoid of point or destination, anticipates the increasingly negative view of a life dominated by death and extinction which is the focus of the next two novels, Those Barren Leaves (1925) and Point Counter Point (1928).

CHAPTER 2 DEAD AND BROKEN BRANCHES

> From the first growth of the tree, many a limb and branch has decayed and dropped off and these lost branches of various sizes may represent those whole orders, families and genera which have now no living representatives, and which are known to us only from having been found in a fossil state.[1]

> A ritual gravely performed is overwhelmingly convincing, for the moment, at any rate. But let it be performed casually and carelessly by people who are not thinking what the rite is meant to symbolize; one perceives that there is nothing behind the symbols, that it is only the acting that matters - the judicious acting of the body - and that the body, the doomed, decaying body, is the one, appalling fact.[2]

The first death to occur within the central narrative of a Huxley novel is that of Grace Elver, a minor character in Those Barren Leaves (1925). Then, in the following novel, Point Counter Point (1928), death proliferates suddenly and violently, carrying off several major and minor characters before their time, and threatening others. Clearly, Huxley's perceptions of his world must have undergone a considerable change since the writing of Crome Yellow, only eight years before. Initially this chapter will trace the course of that apparent change, and the relationship between his preoccupation with death and the influence of Darwin on his assumptions about it. Subsequently, it will explore the ways in which, in Those Barren Leaves and Point Counter Point, these assumptions shape his perceptions of himself and his society, leading him to confront a break with the cultural past which is closely related to the ending of Western man's conception of himself as created in God's image.

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1 Darwin, pp. 171-2.

2 Aldous Huxley, Those Barren Leaves [1925] (St. Albans: Triad/Panther Books, 1978), p. 299.

Aldous Huxley's own life was tragically affected by sudden deaths: first that of his mother, to whom he was closely attached, and only a few years later, that of his brother. Both caused him intense grief. It was many years before he was able to distance himself sufficiently from the experiences to write about them extensively (in Eyeless in Gaza, 1935), although the effect can be detected much earlier in oblique references throughout his writing to bereavement. His biographer, Sybille Bedford, sums up the likely influence of these experiences with a quotation from Grey Eminence (1941):

> There remained with him, latent at ordinary times, but always ready to come to the surface, a haunting sense of the vanity, the transience, the precariousness of all human happiness.[3]

Personal loss, for Huxley, underlined a widely shared interpretation of Darwin's evolutionary theory as it related to death and extinction. The ongoing loss of a traditional religious faith (to which evolutionary theory had contributed) and the vast, unnecesssary loss of life in the First World War favoured a reading of natural selection as evidence of man's total isolation, the meaninglessness of the individual and the shifting variable, subjective nature of reality. The non-fixity of species and the close kinship of all forms of animal life, and especially of man and the apes, were particularly disturbing aspects to many people. Huxley's novels of this period often express cynicism, despair and fear, either explicitly, through the characters' voices, or implicitly as tone, structural emphasis or underlying assumption. They reflect a widespread insecurity which was the aftermath of the hostility and outrage of the Victorian response.

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3 Bedford, p.26.

The growing predominance of death in Huxley's novels is one of the most obvious expressions of his inner fears. Of all the deaths in Leaves or Point, that of little Phil (Point, Chs. 33-35) has the greatest emotional impact and is the most troubling to the reader. Although described with impersonal economy, it is a painfully protracted event, with an extra twist of last hopes raised only to be finally dashed. It could arouse suspicions of gratuitous sensation-seeking,[4] but they would be unfounded, because this death serves a particular function in relation to the novel's search for value and meaning in human life. It resembles none of the other deaths in this or preceding novels: they are all shown to be, if not 'deserved', at least consistent with the lives of the victims. Even Grace Elver (in Leaves), the most vulnerable and helpless of them, dies as a result of over-eating against explicit advice. In other words, these deaths are felt to be part of an ordered and comprehensible, if harsh, universe, where humans live and behave according to predictable laws of moral cause and effect. This sense of consistency is expressed in Point as an opinion that 'everything that happens is intrinsically like the man it happens to' (p. 284). The idea is confirmed repeatedly in the lives of the characters in the novel, and in their deaths: Webley's coldly brutal murder by Spandrell, for instance.

With little Phil's death, a new element, chance, pushes the reader over the edge of human understanding into a universe of moral chaos, where the only laws that matter are those based on survival. Instead of any divine providence, there is only an impersonal nature. Little Phil's death, as well as suggesting the fate of a civilization, seems to confirm the meaninglessness of the individual human existence, and the futility of postulating morally intelligible laws in matters of life and death: not only does he die, but he dies hideously while his parents watch, helpless.

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4 See, for instance, A. Kettle, An Introduction to the English Novel, Vol.2 (London: Hutchinson, 1953), p. 152.

In the Darwinian universe, death and extinction are central to the process of constant, irreversible change. Success, or survival, has no moral connotations, being a measure of suitability to conditions or ability to adapt to them. Moral considerations may even be interpreted as a handicap in surviving: Burlap, the hypocritically pious opportunist of Point, is the 'fittest' in that world to survive. 'Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven', comments Huxley in his concluding sentence, cynically summing up the discrepancy between Christian belief and his own perceptions of reality.

Darwin himself, like many other Victorian scientists, was apparently untroubled by the more tragic implications of evolutionary theory, although, as the opening quotation to this chapter shows, he acknowledged a dark side existed. For him, its significant and redeeming aspects were its emphasis on community and egalitarianism. His writing demonstrates an outlook in which life was its own 'raison d'être' - the 'Tree of Life' incorporates death and extinction easily into its burgeoning structure. Stark and distinct though they are, the 'dead and broken branches' are yet an integral part of the living whole. In similarly positive tones, T.H. Huxley talked about 'the threefold unity - namely, a unity of power or faculty, a unity of form, and a unity of substantial composition - [that] does pervade the whole living world'.[5]

For those who grew up two generations later, in a society where, for many, the tides of Christian beliefs had receded irrevocably, leaving a conception of man as 'a lonely, intelligent mutation, scrambling with the brutes for his sustenance'[6] and a disillusioned perception of the hollowness of the traditional institutions and rituals, it

5 T.H. Huxley, 'On the Physical Basis of Life' in F. Kermode, et al. (eds.), The Oxford Anthology of English Literature, Vol. II (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), p.1059.

6 J.W. Burrow, in Darwin, p. 48.

was not possible to view the world with T.H. Huxley's equanimity. Unlike theories about nature from earlier times, Darwin's

> ...held no clues for human conduct, no answer to human moral dilemmas. It seems probable that the popularity, in this century, of ethical doctrines, both of the existentialist and of the more typically Anglo-Saxon varieties, which regard goodness as created by human choice and commitment rather than as an innate property of things, owes a good deal to the underlying assumption of the purposelessness of the physical world.[7]

To Aldous Huxley and his contemporaries fell the task of delineating this newly-revealed universe in terms of 'human moral dilemmas'. In the face of that purposelessness, they sought to locate and affirm its vast boundaries and explore the possibilities for mankind that lay within them. Among the most pressing of these, since it was at the heart of traditional religious belief, was the question of human mortality. Where Christianity had promised to liberate the faithful from death, Darwin's arguments on natural selection promised both the finality of death and extinction, and the implacability of change. It is in the light of this that death in Huxley's first four novels needs to be considered, with particular emphasis on Leaves and Point. Together, the four mark an escalating search, as in most serious artistic endeavours of the period,

> ...for a way in which they can, with dignity, confront a universe deprived of what was once its centre and its living purpose, a world deprived of a generally accepted integrating principle, which has become disjointed, purposeless - absurd.[8]

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7 J.W. Burrow, in Darwin, p. 43.

8 Martin Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd [1969] (Woodstock, N.Y.: Overlook Press, 1973), p.24.

While death takes quite a prominent place in Huxley's early short stories ('The Farcical History of Richard Greenow' and 'Happily Ever After',[9] for instance), it is less obvious in the earlier novels. In Crome, it is very much obscured by the mood of light-heartedness: the only deaths to occur are those of Sir Hercules and his wife. More relevant is the passage in chapter 5 in which Henry Wimbush, as farmer, parodies the role of natural selection by deciding which animals shall live and which must die.

> 'The sow next door,' Mr Wimbush went on, 'has done very badly. She only had five in her litter. I shall give her another chance. If she does no better next time, I shall fat her up and kill her. There's the boar ... Fine old beast, isn't he? But he's getting past his prime. He'll have to go, too.' ...
> In another enclosure stood the bull, massive as a locomotive...
> 'Splendid animal,' said Henry Wimbush. 'Pedigree stock. But he's getting old, like the boar...'
> 'Couldn't you give the animals a little holiday from producing children?' asked Anne. 'I'm so sorry for the poor things.'
> Mr. Wimbush shook his head. 'Personally,' he said, 'I rather like seeing fourteen pigs grow where only one grew before. The spectacle of so much crude life is refreshing.' (pp. 25-27)

And the conversation moves on to the human parallels, with the explicit reminder that man is subject to the same physical laws as other animals. Mr Scogan blithely concludes the conversation with talk of technology's impending liberation of man from the bonds between love and procreation, but makes it apparent that technology does nothing to liberate man from his essentially physical nature:

> '...an impersonal generation will take the place of Nature's hideous system. In vast state incubators, rows upon rows of gravid bottles will supply the world with the population it requires. The family system will disappear; society, sapped at its very base, will have to find new foundations; and Eros, beautifully and irresponsibly free, will flit like a gay butterfly from flower to flower through a sunlit world.'
> 'It sounds lovely', said Anne.
> 'The distant future always does'. (p. 28)

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9 A. Huxley, Limbo (London: Chatto and Windus, 1920).

Mr Scogan is not to be identified with Huxley himself, but, like some of the other characters, can be felt to represent a part of Huxley extended into a consistent being with a valid approach to life. Huxley's critical distance from Scogan can be felt in the irony with which he is portrayed, but there is an emotional confusion of outlook in this speech which cannot simply be attributed to the character of Scogan, as rational, scientific materialist; nor can it be dismissed as humorous whimsy, because the matters which the whole chapter touches upon are profoundly important in terms of a society attempting to find a new perception of itself. Emotion and confusion lie in the alternating revulsion and attraction in such terms as 'Nature's hideous system', 'vast state incubators', 'rows of gravid bottles', or Eros 'like a gay butterfly', suggesting simultaneously a horror of human reproductive physiology, a romantic perception of love, and an intelligence that mocks its own delusions without being quite able to break away from them. The confusion is bound up with Huxley's feelings about death, which are not yet explicit, but expressed through the necessary association of death with physiology, or with man as animal. Man freed from the necessity of procreation he sees as man freed from the cycle of time and change, a butterfly in an eternal summer. Scogan's 'liberation', though, is felt to have its own repellent side, when such a fundamentally significant area of human experience can be reduced to the absurdity of 'gravid bottles' - in reality it entraps man even further within a physical universe, even though it is one in which he can exercise control over his animal existence: it is without any spiritual or mystical dimensions.

All these are points which Huxley was to develop and extend in Brave New World (1932). Here they briefly show his early sense of the implications of the theory of natural selection for man's hitherto exalted conception of himself, for religious thought, for social morality, and for traditional perceptions of death. Denis's

final departure from Crome in a hearse is suggestive of death in a number of ways: one of these is that many things of value must die in the change from the old way of life of Crome to the modern society of the city, including the individual's prospects of happiness or fulfilment.

In the world of Antic Hay death has a far stronger presence. It hovers continuously around the peripheries of the plot, never far from the author's consciousness. It is associated now with the tensions of life in an impersonal, urbanized society, as well as with an increased sense of human physicality. The body and its functions are described with a scientific objectivity which borders on revulsion. Thus Myra Viveash, of the 'dying' smile and 'expiring' voice, is much more self-consciously physical than her predecessor Anne Wimbush:

> Mrs Viveash smiled her smile of agony. 'Kidneys? But what a memento mori! There are other portions of the anatomy.' She threw back her cloak, revealing an arm, a bare shoulder, a slant of pectoral muscle. She was wearing a white dress that, leaving her back and shoulders bare, came up, under either arm, to a point in front and was held there by a golden thread about the neck. 'For example,' she said, and twisted her hand several times over and over, making the slender arm turn at the elbow, as though to demonstrate the movement of the articulations and the muscular play. (p.61)

What is ostensibly a description of sexual allure is made ambivalent (and androgynous) by the impersonal, physiological precision of 'pectoral muscle', and 'movement of the articulations', for instance, as though viewed through the eyes of a scientist - perhaps Shearwater, at whom the display is directed. Simultaneously, there is talk by Coleman along pruriently physical lines, while Opps exclaims (p. 62) 'I loathe them ... I hate everyone poor, or ill, or old. Can't abide them; they make me positively sick', in response to a small drama of illness and poverty being enacted separately, but alongside the group.

This interpolated drama, Gumbril's later thoughts suggest, has been included to recreate a sense of the incongruity of city life, with its juxtaposition of wealth and poverty, education and deprivation, gaiety and misery, where millions of lives are lived within a small area, without ever interconnecting. It also expresses Gumbril's vague sense of guilt at being one of the privileged with the right to 'the leisured complexities of love'.

But to interpret the passage wholly in this way is to isolate it from the rest of the novel, which expresses no interest in such matters as social inequalities. It is easier to appreciate the coherence of the episode with the whole novel if it is viewed as an accumulation of reminders of human subjection to the laws of the physical universe. The destitute couple are described in clichés, so that it is hard at first to connect Opps's sense of loathing to them. (It is felt to be shared by the others present: Mercaptan's response is '...how well and frankly you express what we all feel and lack the courage to say.') When eventually the woman is described as an individual whose face is old beyond the reckoning of years, and who has 'lost several of her teeth', the sense of revulsion is perceived to be connected to her physical degeneration.

There is an implicit connection here between working class poverty and the vulnerability of the human body to the processes of time and the laws of matter. The uneducated poor seem to represent physical humanity (and, by extension, death), while the affluent and cultured seem to represent an eternal present of youth, health and intellectual play. At the most obvious level, Huxley is critical of Opps and Mercaptan; but he cannot altogether distance himself from Opps's disgust. He both sees his delusions and participates in them.

Whether he was aware of his ambivalence at this stage is not clear. Five years later, in Point (Ch. 1),he mocked Walter Bidlake, closely identified with himself, for the intellectual, liberal views on the class struggle covering a deep-seated fear and sense of disgust at working class individuals. As in the passage from Antic Hay, these negative feelings are identified with the physical frailty of the poor, their susceptibility to disease, their seemingly brazen acceptance of their physical nature. Walter remembers visiting a dying gardener:

> In Wetherington's sick-room even pity found it hard to flourish. He sat there, while his mother talked to the dying man and his wife, gazing, reluctant but compelled by the fascination of horror, at the ghostly skeleton in the bed and breathing through his bunch of cowslips the warm and sickening air. Even through the fresh delicious scent of the cowslips he could smell the inveterate odours of the sick-room. He felt almost no pity, only horror, fear, and disgust. And even when Mrs. Wetherington began to cry, turning her face away so that the sick man should not see her tears, he felt not pitiful so much as uncomfortable, embarrassed ...
> He felt ashamed of these emotions as he remembered them. But that was how he had felt, how he still felt. (Point, pp. 20-21)

It also becomes clear in Point that Huxley's feelings towards the poor were partly based on a deeply rooted assumption, originating in Victorian times, that materialism was invariably linked with lower-class radicalism. Darwin had been rebuked for publishing The Descent of Man at a time 'when the sky of Paris was red with the incendiary flames of the Commune.'[10]

Huxley retained throughout his life a rigid sense of division between people, the culminating expression of which is the nightmare vision of society in Brave New World. It is likely that this sense was a reflection of the English class system and the widespread anxiety caused by, among other things, increasing social mobility, female suffrage and the spread of Marxism. But it also reflects the inner duality which led

10 J.W. Burrow in Darwin, p. 32.

him to distance and categorize all aspects of his experience. It was by such means - dividing, grouping, categorizing - that he sought to impose structure and order on life which, to him, had been robbed of meaning by the fact of physical degeneration and death. It can be seen, in the passage about the destitute couple referred to above, that Huxley has attempted to invest the couple with the loathed physical aspects of himself, then to distance and dehumanize them. Thus he projected his inner duality on to the external world.

Cyril Connolly recognized the relationship between Huxley's inner division and his perceptions of the world:

> His nature was a very English one, that of the divided man, the lover of beauty and pleasure dominated by the puritan conscience. At first his dichotomy is apparent in his treatment of love. Love means everything to him but sex - and sex, although he is obsessed by it, is disgusting. The warfare is extended to become a warfare between the senses on one side, and the intellect, generously moralising in the moment of victory on the other, until Huxley the intellectual pulls the lower self along like a man pulling a dog by a leash.[11]

A modern reader is not so likely to regard Huxley as 'obsessed' with sex, and quicker to see that his perceptions of sex are, as Connolly concedes, only part of his total approach to the life of the body. The relationship between Emily and Gumbril (in Antic Hay) illustrates well the point Connolly makes here about the difficulty Huxley had in connecting love and sex. Yet Emily's lack of sexuality represents a more general point: like Gumbril senior, she has a disembodied, spiritual presence which contrasts with the other characters in the novel. The two of them, with their innocent idealism and association with pastoral imagery, appear to represent for Huxley a nostalgic, sentimental view of an old way of life. The rather self-pitying

11 Cyril Connolly, Enemies of Promise (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1938), p. 64.

implication of this is that the modern, urban generation is subject to the constraints of time and matter as past generations, with the security of their certainties, had not been. Mercaptan, Myra and their friends have no sense of continuity with the past, no future ('tomorrow will be as awful as today' (p. 249)), and have no values beyond the immediate gratification of physical urges. Along with its whimsy and restless, ironic humour, Antic Hay cultivates a mood of self-destruction that is partly the assumed air, or mask, of the period; but it has a basis in a real and deepening sense of the purposelessness of life.

The movement that characterizes the change from Crome to Hay continues in the two following novels with which this chapter is principally concerned, Those Barren Leaves and Point Counter Point. The difference between them is that, whereas in the first pair of novels the concern with death is only one of several strands in the total fabric, in the second pair it expands to dominate the whole. They are felt to reflect a changing social reality, less concerned with freedom and youth than with old age, sickness, death, and a society on the brink of self-destruction. It is a bleak vision, intensified by the cynical humour of the verbal interplay between characters, a humour from which much of the earlier playfulness is gone.

The linking together of these two later novels should not be taken as an indication of equal literary merit. Leaves lacks the coherence and formal balance of Point. Despite this, it is partially successful, particularly in its marriage of setting and theme. The fading light of an Italian summer, and the landscape in which history and nature compete for dominance, together create a metaphor for man's vulnerability to

time and change.[12] The choice of Italy as a setting for a group of English people serves the purpose of isolating the central characters from their social environment. The postman's bike ride, opening the novel, forms a contrast to Denis's ride to Crome (Crome, Ch. 1). Both suggest geographical isolation; but where Denis was felt to be proceeding, like the train, 'deeper into the green heart of England', to be drawing closer to some essential quality of his cultural inheritance, the postman's thoughts indicate that he is riding resentfully away from all that is relevant to his life or that of his countrymen. The inhabitants of the palazzo, Lilian Aldwinkle and the rest, despite their pretensions, prove to be as isolated culturally from their surroundings as they are physically from society. Their affinities with Italian civilization are more a matter of romantic imagination than reality.

Italy, as the ancient centre of European civilization and the birthplace of the Christian Church, provides its own pervasive comment on the passage of time and change. The proud claims to immortality of the art, architecture and music of the past are persuasive when those who have the education to appreciate them - such as Cardan, Chelifer, Calamy and Mary Thriplow - see the very landscape transformed by the art of past centuries into an expression of man's power. 'Even Nature, in Italy, is like a work of art,' says Mary Thriplow (p. 43). But the narrative ironically undermines the claims of art, setting all human history and achievement in a perspective that makes them subject to the overwhelming forces of nature: growth, change, death and decay. Italy's fading vitality includes the forces of civilization on the one hand, and nature at her most compellingly warm and fertile on the other. Its people, absorbed in the enjoyment of life, have no reason to consider the significance

12 C.S. Ferns sees the choice of Italy as an incidental variation of the English country house setting 'since little attempt is made to explore the possibilities of a foreign setting'.
C.S. Ferns, Huxley: Novelist (London: The Athlone Press, 1980), p. 78.

of the past with its achievements, and are therefore unenlightened by it, content to accept unthinkingly a purely physical existence.[13]

Irene and Hovenden, because of their youth and innocence, are also, when together, prepared to accept life on those terms. In Chapter 1 (Part IV), Irene, Hovenden and Grace Elver drive through the countryside to Rome.

> 'Gosh!' said Lord Hovenden expressively, as they slid with locked wheels down a high street that had been planned for pack-asses and mules. From pedimented windows between the piasters [sic] of the palaces, curious faces peered out at them. They tobogganed down, through the high renaissance, out of an arch of the Middle Ages, into the dateless and eternal fields. From Montepulciano they descended on to Lake Trasimene.
>
> 'Wasn't there a battle here, or something?' asked Irene, when she saw the name on the map.
>
> Lord Hovenden seemed to remember that there had indeed been something of the kind in this neighbourhood. 'But it doesn't make much difference, does it?'
>
> Irene nodded; it certainly didn't seem to make much difference.
>
> 'Nofing makes any difference,' said Lord Hovenden, making himself heard with difficulty in the teeth of the wind which his speedometer registered as blowing at forty-five miles an hour. 'Except' - the wind made him bold - 'except you.' (p. 247)

The car's descent through the town irreverently telescopes long stretches of history into seconds, sweeping out into the ancient history of Lake Trasimene, with the suggestion, in the 'dateless and eternal fields' beyond, of time preceding human existence. The young couple's careless disregard for the historical significance of their surroundings, and unselfconscious response to each other's sexual attraction, suggests briefly a kind of immortality. Like Anne and Gombauld dancing together in Crome, they transcend their separate identities, the speed of the car being akin to the trance-inducing quality of the music. But, although temporarily forgotten by them,

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13 As described, for instance in Leaves, Part II, Ch. 6.

Grace Elver, who is soon to die, sits in the back seat of the car, her mental deficiency in Huxley's terms like a 'memento mori', a reminder of their transience and isolation.

The implications of this passage are extended a little later in a scene in which Irene and Hovenden themselves dance together, to the music of a jazz band. Suddenly another band strikes up simultaneously, with the Pilgrims' Chorus from Tannhäuser:

> Irene and Lord Hovenden, locked in one another's arms, were stepping lightly, meanwhile, lightly and accurately over the concrete dance-floor. Obedient to the music of the jazz band, forty other couples stepped lightly round them. Percolating insidiously through the palisade that separated the dance-floor from the rest of the world, thin wafts of the Pilgrims' Chorus intruded faintly upon the jazz.
> 'Listen,' said Hovenden. Dancing, they listened. 'Funny it sounds when you hear bof at ve same time!'
> But the music from beyond the palisade was not strong enough to spoil their rhythm. They listened for a little, smiling at the absurdity of this other music from outside; but they danced on uninterruptedly. After a time they did not even take the trouble to listen. (p. 262)

Like the passage before it, this one is intended to convey both the comedy and tragedy of life. Tragedy, in that the lovers' happiness is only a brief moment in the inexorable passage of time leading to death; comedy, in that in their dance of life, like Anne and Gombauld's, Theodore and Myra's before them, they participate in the ongoing, regenerative processes of nature that defy time. Their dance is perceived more clearly than before as an ideal of unity, which is a counter-statement to isolation and transience. Huxley perceives it, but as an outsider.

As I remarked before, Leaves is structurally flawed; two quite different novels that throw little apparent light on one another have been put together as one. It represents Huxley's 'multiplicity' of vision out of control. But it achieves a certain

kind of coherence in its pursuit of a truth that will withstand time, change, death. All the characters seek some form of permanence or certainty. None have found it at the end of the novel, except for Irene and Hovenden in their particular way which cannot benefit any of the major characters. But this is not a novel of despair, despite Francis Chelifer's morbid surrender to suburban life. Calamy's retreat, which must be interpreted as an evasion of life, at least allows the novel to conclude on a note of hope for a life unconquered by the triviality of Lilian Aldwinkle and Mrs. Cloudesley Shove. It is a novel of intermittent sunlight and brooding cloud.

Point Counter Point is in contrast a well-constructed, artistically coherent novel: it has unity of theme and style and a well-developed narrative momentum. Despite this, it is in many ways less satisfying to read than Leaves because it lacks any balancing comic vision in a generally pessimistic account of human weakness. This is perhaps a surprising deficiency in view of the central philosophy. Where the philosophical movement of Leaves was away from human contact and relationship, in an attempt to find a fixed, non-human truth, Point takes the opposite direction, towards the world of relationships and subjective, shifting truths. As Huxley did in the pair of novels discussed in Chapter 1, here also he moves from a rurally-based community associated with tradition and history in the earlier novel to a city representing the modern world in the second.

Naturally there was little to be gained for Huxley as a novelist in pursuing a non-human truth. His novels had always depended for their energy on the interplay of thoughts, beliefs, ideas between people and his observations of people's behaviour in relationship. However, his temperamental inclination was to withdraw from people, to live in the world of thought, intellect, ideas. The conflict between the inward and

the outward worlds that this produced in him was shared with many other writers of the time, including Kafka ('In the struggle between yourself and the world, you must take the side of the world')[14] and Thomas Mann. J.P. Stern, writing about Mann's Buddenbrooks, could have been describing Calamy when he said that:

> consciousness, in this situation, is presented as the enemy of life, as a spirituality which exacts an understanding over and above the needs of the practical life, an understanding of the world and self at all costs - even at the cost of life itself.[15]

It was in recognition of this that Huxley deserted his tentative optimism about the value of solitary contemplation and returned to society. The change in his perceptions that this return represents is recorded in a letter of 1925:

> I'm glad you like the Leaves. They are all right certainly; tremendously accomplished, but in a queer way, I now feel, jejune and shallow and off the point. All I've written so far has been off the point. And I've taken such enormous pains to get off it; that's the stupidity. All this fuss in the intellectual void; and meanwhile the other things go on in a quiet domestic way, quite undisturbed.[16]

The 'other things' which 'go on in a quiet domestic way', form the material of Point. The pursuit of truth has changed direction as the result of a perception articulated in Point by Rampion:

> This non-human truth that the scientists are trying to get at with their intellects - it's utterly irrelevant to ordinary human living. Our truth, the relevant human truth, is something you discover by living - living completely, with the whole man... (p. 402)

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14 F. Kafka, quoted by J.P. Stern, 'The Theme of Consciousness: Thomas Mann', in James McFarlane and Malcolm Bradbury (eds.) Modernism (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976), p. 449.

15 J.P. Stern, Bradbury and McFarlane (eds.), p. 425.

16 Grover (ed.), p. 242.

This 'living completely' is attempted in Point through relationships, principally sexual ones, but also through those between friends and family members. As in Antic Hay, the interest focuses on a group of characters who are young, well-educated, upper middle-class (with some exceptions); but unlike their counterparts in Antic Hay, they exist in relationship with a 'real' world - they have jobs, families, commitments, lives that are felt to proceed from a past continuous with their present. These lives and the dense, interweaving network which they form, the tensions that simultaneously hold them together and pull them apart, are integrally related to the city setting.

To some extent, the city of Point is any European city of the 1920s, displaying many of the strains which affected all western urbanized society in those years. Webley, for instance, represents forces of fascism which existed throughout the western world, just as Illidge represents the growing social mobility of the working people. But a pattern of shared assumptions, arising from a common history and values, unites these characters, and identifies them all not only as English, but as English of a particular group. Although Point illustrates a much broader social outlook than Hay, it has none of the cosmopolitan flavour of, say, Wyndham Lewis's or Christopher Isherwood's fiction of the time. It describes a narrow circle of people from the inside, without registering or acknowledgeing its own narrowness.

The search for a single, unifying truth or reality, which formed the thematic basis of Leaves, continues, then, in Point, even though addressed from a different angle, which is that the answers to the dilemmas of human existence lie within what is universal to human experience. In Leaves, ideas were expressed as opinions, isolated from the social background or events which generated them, politely exchanged in

conversation around the dinner table. Consequently, such a phenomenon as the growing public interest in socialism was scarcely registered, except as a mild curiosity. In Point, the question is given more relevance and immediacy by its felt influence in the lives of characters such as Illidge and Rampion. Similarly, the difficulties of relationships are represented in terms of emotional commitments and responsibilities, such as between Walter Bidlake and Marjorie Carling, rather than through a casual encounter like Calamy's with Mary Thriplow. Most of the characters in Point are tied inescapably within their world, not free to come and go like Mrs. Aldwinkle's guests, or like the characters from Crome and Hay.

The counterpoint from which this novel takes its name provides an image of the interweaving, interconnected quality of people's lives, with the suggestion of an underlying harmony that holds them together in relationships. It corresponds to Claude Bernard's image of the 'universal concert', which inspires Lord Edward Tantamount to begin a life of scientific research. But the term 'counterpoint' has a certain ambiguity, emphasizing both the independence and relationship of voices or parts; with the addition of 'point' to produce 'point counter point' this ambiguity has been intensified in favour of the element of independence, suggesting something like opposition, or even antagonism between parts. And so it is with the novel: the tensions between people's lives can be felt to be created by antagonistic or destructive forces as much as, or more than by harmonizing forces. This is borne out by a remark of Huxley's in an essay, 'The Rest is Silence', about a dramatization of the novel:

> From the abbreviated play it was necessary to omit almost all the implied or specified counter which, in the novel, tempered, or at least was intended to temper, the harshness of the 'points'. The play, as a whole, was curiously hard and brutal.[17]

17 A. Huxley, 'The Rest is Silence' from Music at Night (London: Chatto and Windus, 1931), p. 21.

A similar type of tension has been observed in the earlier novels. There, the harmony was felt as an affinity between people sharing traditional values and social and religious customs (judged to be inadequate in the face of modern perceptions of reality). In Point, the past, symbolized in part by the elder Bidlakes and Quarles, represents only a dead way of life. The 'counter' forces for harmony, unity, relationship, are embodied in those who relate to the world as a 'whole' or integrated people, untroubled by the fragmented vision and personalities of most of the characters. Rampion is foremost among them - Mary, Elinor and little Phil are others. Their combined strength gives resistance, and therefore added impact, to the final disintegration, an impact that is altogether missing from the anti-climactic conclusion of Leaves.

Indeed, the relationships in Leaves are characteristically negative, which is less a problem for the comic sections of the novel than when the tone is serious. Chelifer's chilling response to Grace Elver's death is consistent with the emotional paralysis of most of the characters.

> The commotion was caused by the beginning of Miss Elver's death-agony. Providence, having decided that my education had gone far enough, had broken off the lesson. The means it employed were, I must say, rather violent. A vain man might have been gratified by the reflection that one woman had been made miserable in order that he might be taught a lesson, while another had died - like King John, of a surfeit of lampreys - in order that the lesson might be interrupted before it was carried too disagreeably far. But as it happens, I am not particularly vain. (p. 329)

One may feel that such words are Huxley's indictment of Chelifer's shortcomings, but even Cardan, at a point where he appears to have the author's full endorsement, spends Grace's entire funeral occupied with thoughts, not of pity for the victim of fate

and his own interference, but of his own old age and the nature of man's mortality (Ch. 9).

A greater emphasis on the complexity of human feelings and behaviour in Point means that characters are generally more generously portrayed, while negative or destructive qualities are more likely to be recognized for what they are. Thus, Philip Quarles perceives the crippling effect his emotional detachment has on his life - and though, like Calamy, he retreats from the world at the novel's conclusion, it is felt to be justified by the threatening collapse of a particular society, not to be a rejection of humanity.

The critical emphasis of Point is on the overcoming of isolation through relationship and wholeness of being. Insofar as the novel is successful, it shows the forces in individuals that work against the achievement of balance, or wholeness. Many of the characters are familiar 'types' from the earlier novels who represent aspects of Huxley's own nature and experience, Walter, Philip and Spandrell, for instance. They are ruthlessly exposed as incomplete, ineffectual people who are unable to accept the emotional and physical aspects of their own being or to relate fully to other people. Representing the affirmative values is Mark Rampion, whose role is to declaim, prophet-like, against the incompleteness of individuals in modern society. Rampion is based on the D.H. Lawrence of The Rainbow and Women in Love, whose ideas Huxley admired, if he did not fully share. But he did share Lawrence's concern over what he perceived as the breakdown of values and the fragmentation of society.

'Rampion ... has qualities which all other characters in the novel desperately need,' remarks Jerome Meckier in a lengthy but less than penetrating discussion of Lawrence's influence on Huxley.[18] Yet Rampion is barely a character at all, having no essential role in the plot, and existing apparently solely as a mouthpiece for Huxley's Lawrence-inspired ideas. This is a fatal limitation for a character intended to represent full and balanced being through relationships; Rampion is illuminating as far as Huxley's values are concerned principally because of what he lacks. Huxley appears to have been drawn to Lawrence's passion and vitality, and has attempted to portray those qualities in Rampion's speech as a contrast to the effete, decadent detachment of the other characters. But he is much more attached, for all their divisions and short-comings, to the other characters. One is constantly aware of his respect for the wit, circumspection and erudition they display. It appears that it is really Rampion himself who, in his violently declamatory, arrogant and repetitive monologues, lacks the much sought balance between reason and passion. Huxley is unable to identify those qualities which are needed to transcend the separateness of the ego and create a sense of unity with the universe. As a consequence, Rampion is not strong enough to provide a philosophical centre or counter balance to the novel's pessimism, although he represents a different approach to the problems of human existence from that in Leaves. The energy and promise he initially brings to the novel dissipates after the account of his pastoral-style romance with Mary, leaving its lack of positive philosophical under-pinning even more noticeable than in the other novels.

It seems, then, that Point is characterized by that same basic contradiction in its view of experience that characterises his earlier novels. Like many of its characters, the novel cannot achieve what it strives to because it is weakened by its own unresolved conflicts. The depiction of a society riven by division and conflict is

18 Meckier, p. 105.

not in itself inimical to the 'Rampion' view of the world: it can be interpreted as what happens to a society full of divided individuals, individuals who, if they chose, could be balanced, whole, 'human'. But it is harder to account for the view of humanity running incessantly counter to Rampion's. It could perhaps be called the 'Fulke Greville' view, since it corresponds with the lines by him which introduce the novel.

> Oh, wearisome condition of humanity,
> Born under one law, to another bound,
> Vainly begot and yet forbidden vanity,
> Created sick, commanded to be sound.
> What meaneth nature by these diverse laws,
> Passion and reason, self-division's cause?

The view that man is fatally weakened by the inherited division between his 'higher' spiritual self and his 'lower' animal self establishes a clear hold on the novel from the opening pages:

> He gave the final touches to his white tie. From the mirror her face looked out at him, close beside his own. It was a pale face and so thin that the down-thrown light of the electric lamp hanging above them made a shadow in the hollows below the cheek-bones. Her eyes were darkly ringed. Rather too long at the best of times, her straight nose protruded bleakly from the unfleshed face. She looked ugly, tired and ill. Six months from now her baby would be born. Something that had been a single cell, a cluster of cells, a little sac of tissue, a kind of worm, a potential fish with gills, stirred in her womb and would one day become a man - a grown man, suffering and enjoying, loving and hating, thinking, remembering, imagining. And what had been a blob of jelly within her body would invent a god and worship; what had been a kind of fish would create and, having created, would become the battle-ground of disputing good and evil; what had blindly lived in her as a parasitic worm would look at the stars, would listen to music, would read poetry. A thing would grow into a person, a tiny lump of stuff would become a human body, a human mind. The astounding process of creation was going on within her; but Marjorie was conscious only of sickness and lassitude; the mystery for her meant nothing but fatigue and ugliness and a chronic anxiety about the future, pain of the mind as well as discomfort of the body. (p. 8)

This passage is highly characteristic of Point in the effect of disturbance and division it creates. The disturbance arises from the sense of irreconcilable differences and incongruous contrasts. It is full of the energy of recoil, a pulling apart and away, not only of the elements within the narrative, but of the writer from his subject, creating a distant, alienated view. Thus we are asked to see man as a creature of absurdly incompatible fragments and parts, some physical - reflecting origins and mortal nature - others spiritual, with a capacity for constructing illusions to match man's needs.

The physical aspect of man is associated with non-human qualities deriving from the evolutionary past - fish-like, or worm-like qualities. But there is also the implication that the essence of humanity lies in separable, non-physical attributes - the intellectual and spiritual. (Francis Chelifer, in Leaves (p. 89), explicitly expressed a belief that this was so.) Furthermore these disparate elements, human and non-human, are felt to be warring with one another, the human continually betrayed by the non-human.

This is in total contrast to Rampion's views of the human state, which incorporate all aspects equally. In yet another contrast, the passage demonstrates an inability, in spite of the apparent attempt to do so, to discover human truths through human relationships. These lines on the unborn child have no bearing on the relationship being enacted in the narrative, as Marjorie's later thoughts about her pregnancy do. They are clearly not the thoughts of either person, but Huxley's own view, interpolated in a way that suddenly pulls away from the immediate drama to a distant vantage point which depersonalizes the situation. Marjorie becomes a death-

like, ugly creature with a long nose, and the unborn child of the relationship becomes 'a cluster of cells' or 'a blob of jelly'.

A similar passage occurs a little later:

> And then there was the baby. He was making her pay for that. His child. He was bored with her, because she was always tired and ill; he didn't like her any more. That was the greatest injustice of all.
> A cell had multiplied itself and become a worm, the worm had become a fish, the fish was turning into the foetus of a mammal. Marjorie felt sick and tired. Fifteen years hence a boy would be confirmed. Enormous in his robes, like a full-rigged ship, the Bishop would say: 'Do ye here in the presence of God, and of this congregation, renew the solemn promise and vow that was made in your name at your Baptism?' And the ex-fish would answer with passionate conviction: 'I do.'
> For the thousandth time she wished she were not pregnant. (p. 152)

Like the scene at the mirror, this again recoils with disgust from the evolutionary history of man that is a betrayal of man's divine and immortal status, and mocks the pretensions of 'civilized' beliefs.

The novel's problem does not lie so much in the divided view itself as in the fact that it represents an impasse which blocks any developing or positive theme from emerging. For all his objectivity, Huxley remains caught in the situation he describes, unable to free himself in order to move on to a more typically twentieth-century perspective. The battle being fought throughout the novel is essentially a nineteenth-century one, in which an emergent science clashes with centuries-old concepts and beliefs, with all their attendant fears and superstitions. Huxley, heir to these divergent forces even through his genealogy, genuinely assumes the truth of Darwinian theory, but vigorously resists it. The resistance can be felt in the antagonism and revulsion that pervade the language of the physical. The outcome is the tortured see-sawing of

a consciousness which cannot bring itself to face the vision of Nietzsche, a vision of total isolation, despair and meaninglessness.

It is significant that little Phil's death does not conclude the novel, although it is clearly the most painfully felt episode. This death, which is such a very physical one in the sense that the mind and body cease to function by degrees, represents the non-human world of the evolutionists, and connects with other aspects of the novel to symbolize decay, sterility and hopelessness. The child, the family and the society constitute one of nature's 'dead and broken branches'. But the impetus of the narrative continues past this point to gather energy for the death of Spandrell, which resembles a negative apotheosis. Although it is seldom remarked because of his apparent similarity to Baudelaire, Spandrell is very much a part of Huxley, like Philip Quarles. He is the part that clings, like a rather petulant, disappointed child, to the traditional concept of God as an ultimate reality that can be understood in human terms. By punishing himself with his own death, to a background of beautiful music, Spandrell appears to prove, finally, the existence of a divine overseer.

Huxley partly endorses Spandrell's view by, for instance, allowing Rampion to concede the possibility of its truth. But he undercuts it immediately with the concluding scene, Beatrice and Burlap, happily playing in the bath. The impersonal universe in which little Phil has suffered and died is, Huxley suggests, inherited by those who, like Burlap, accept that only two laws exist - those of chance and matter.

CHAPTER 3 TO PROGRESS TOWARDS PERFECTION

> We can so far take a prophetic glance into futurity as to foretell that it will be the common and widely spread species, belonging to the larger and dominant groups, which will ultimately prevail and procreate new and dominant species. As all the living forms of life are the lineal descendants of those which lived long before the Silurian epoch, we may feel certain that the ordinary succession by generation has never once been broken, and that no cataclysm has desolated the whole world. Hence we may look with some confidence to a secure future of equally inappreciable length. And as natural selection works solely by and for the good of each being, all corporeal and mental endowments will tend to progress towards perfection.[1]

> The Utopia of a modern dreamer must needs differ in one fundamental aspect from the Nowheres and Utopias men planned before Darwin quickened the thought of the world. Those were perfect and static states, a balance of happiness won for ever against the forces of unrest and disorder that inhere in things ... Change and development were dammed back by invincible dams for ever. But the Modern Utopia must not be static but kinetic, must shape not as a permanent state but as a hopeful stage, leading to a long ascent of stages. Nowadays we do not resist and overcome the great stream of things, but rather float upon it.[2]

Darwin's tone in the first quotation is one of considered optimism: small wonder, then, that his theory of evolution should be interpreted by enthusiasts such as H.G. Wells to be a confirmation of mankind's inevitable progress towards a glorious future. The very word 'evolution', although not often used by Darwin himself, was already tied in the vernacular to a concept of progress.[3] Thus it not only fitted well with, but greatly strengthened Victorian assumptions about the development processes of the universe. The excerpt from The Origin of Species quoted above shows that even Darwin himself was not free of that common misconception, that the

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1 Darwin, p.459.
2 H.G. Wells, A Modern Utopia, quoted in Gerber, Utopian Fantasy: A Study of English Utopian Fiction since the End of the Nineteenth Century [1955] (McGraw-Hill Book Co. Paperback Edition, 1973), p. 10.
3 See Gould, pp. 36-7.

argument at the heart of his theory proves some law of progressive development. But he never went any further than he did here, to express what may be called a law of 'tendency', describing the general movement of all living forms towards complexity. On one occasion he sternly reminded himself not to refer to organisms as 'higher' or 'lower', an implicit acknowledgement of the fact that the wealth of evidence he had collected demonstrated that organic change led only to increasing adaptations between organisms and their environment, and not to an abstract idea of progress.[4]

Cautiously expressed as it was, Darwin's law of tendency became a reassuring point of overlap for Christians struggling to accept evolutionary theory. The idea of progress sat comfortably alongside that of a divine role in the emergence of mankind. But while this minor heresy was able to be accommodated and absorbed into orthodox Christian doctrine, a far deeper one lay at the very core of Darwin's theory: the assumption that matter is the ground of all existence. In an increasingly pervasive spirit of materialism, the existence of God became for many a relic of a superstitious past. And while human spirituality could not easily be denied, it could be seen to be simply the result of growing neuronal complexity.

When the ideas of inevitable change, or process, and the material nature of the universe merged, they assumed a highly disturbing, but exciting power over the literary imagination.

> Darwin, in his brilliant demolition of the idea of fixed species, invented a world in which essence is replaced by becoming ... The notion of transition, of a world which was to be comprehended, as Engels wrote, not 'as a complex of ready-made 'things', but as a complex of 'processes'', seminally affected the novelist's sense of the self and nature. The writer reading Darwin was made

4 A.G.N. Flew, Evolutionary Ethics (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1967), p. 20.

> more critically aware of the biological factors within the individual, and externally in his relation with the environment.[5]

The writer of this passage goes on to discuss the writing of Hardy, Lawrence and Forster and their study of the development of self 'in its relations and internal processes.' However, while these writers explored the biological nature of man, they all refuted the literalism of the scientific tradition and the idea of man as a knowable entity. Other writers were more influenced by positivism, the claim of science to know. Here the imagination seized upon the idea of progress as historical reality derived from an observation of facts; it saw mankind taking on the role of overseer or controller, exploiting the processes of evolution in the interests of his own ultimate perfection. A new era of utopianism was kindled. An early, but ardent exponent wrote:

> These bodies which we now wear belong to the lower animals; our minds have already outgrown them; already we look upon them with contempt. A time will come when science will transform them by means which we cannot conjecture, and which, even if explained to us, we could not now understand, just as the savage cannot understand electricity, magnetism, or steam. Disease will be extirpated; the causes of decay will be removed; immortality will be invented. ... Finally, men will master the forces of Nature; they will become themselves architects of systems, manufacturers of worlds. Man then will be perfect.[6]

This excerpt represents the beginning of an outpouring which has continued into the twentieth century, and which in the first thirty years of the century included such names as G.K. Chesterton, Rudyard Kipling and E.M. Forster.[7] In the climate these writers helped to produce, a new philosophy of evolutionary ethics emerged.

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5 Roger Ebbatson, The Evolutionary Self (Brighton: Harvester Press, Totowa: Barnes and Noble Books, 1982), pp. xiii-xiv.

6 Winwood Read, Martyrdom of Man (1872), quoted in Gerber, p. 11.

7 For a complete list of utopian writers 1901-1951, see Gerber, Appendix.

One of its leading spokesmen became Julian Huxley, brother of Aldous, and author of this rather startlingly commercial expression of its central hypothesis:

> In the light of evolutionary biology man can now see himself as the sole agent of further evolutionary advance on this planet, and one of the few possible instruments of progress in the universe at large. He finds himself in the unexpected position of business manager for the cosmic process of evolution. He no longer ought to feel separated from the rest of nature, for he is part of it - that part which has become conscious, capable of love and understanding and aspiration. He need no longer regard himself as insignificant in relation to the cosmos.[8]

Aldous Huxley's views were more complex. For him, the positivist view was incompatible with a hope for future glory on earth for humanity, because it rested on the assumption that man had no soul, and existed in his muscle, bone and nerve endings - no matter what heights of moral endeavour an individual might achieve, he or she was still a posturing descendant of an arboreal primate.

The sense of despair and isolation which this produced in him was very much part of the Victorian response to the mechanistic view of the universe created by Darwin. Also part of his Victorian heritage was the accompanying preoccupation with the concept of a divine, unitive power existing separately from the material plane, which would endow life with meaning and purpose, and free mankind from the endless cycle of emotional need and gratification. Calamy, in Those Barren Leaves, expresses this sense of duality of existence in the idea that all physical and social existence is a distraction from the search for the truth which unites, and which must be sought in the 'freedom' of separateness:

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8 J. Huxley, quoted by A.G.N. Flew, p. 60.

> 'The mind must be open, unperturbed, empty of irrelevant things, quiet. There's no room for thoughts in a half-shut, cluttered mind. And thoughts won't enter a noisy mind; they're shy, they remain in their obscure hiding places below the surface, where they can't be got at, so long as the mind is full and noisy. Most of us pass through life without knowing that they're there at all. If one wants to lure them out, one must clear a space for them, one must open the mind wide and wait. And there must be no irrelevant preoccupations prowling around the doors. One must free oneself of those.'
>
> 'I suppose I'm one of the irrelevant preoccupations', said Mary Thriplow, after a little pause.
>
> Calamy laughed, but did not deny it.
>
> 'If that's so,' said Mary, 'why did you make love to me?'
>
> Calamy did not reply. Why indeed? He had often asked that question himself. (Leaves, p. 308)

Huxley's belief, expressed repeatedly in the novels of the twenties, that matter and spirit are incompatible, is represented through a series of characters, like Calamy, whose apparent attachment to the world undermines or threatens their sense of life's unity and purpose. But a closer look at these characters reveals that they are not involved with the world at all; on the contrary, they are characterized by an almost total emotional detachment from the life around them. Their personalities are split in such a way that their physical and emotional responses are at odds with their conscious, reasoning minds, a characteristic of the twentieth century mentality that Hardy had foreshadowed in the figure of Sue Bridehead in Jude the Obscure. Their fragmented inner state is reflected inevitably in their inability to perceive wholeness or harmony in the world around them: life is a collection of separate and discontinuous events, like Spandrell's and Lucy Tantamount's lovers in Point Counter Point. But unlike Hardy, who observed this as a characteristic of the modern mind while retaining his own sense of life's wholeness, Huxley's characters represent the limitations of his own assumptions and experience.

Cyril Connolly, in a passage quoted in Chapter 2, drew attention to an unawareness in Huxley's writing, manifested in that self-division which he believed to be fatal to the novelist. What Connolly termed the 'puritan' in Huxley can be

better identified in this context as the 'scientific materialist', that part which recoiled from the irrational, the sensuous, the emotional, and which found expression through such pedantic characters as Scogan, Cardan, and, in Brave New World, Mustapha Mond, World Controller. The cool, fastidious complacency with which they speak corresponds frequently with the narrator's own voice in the more serious novels.

Just as this scientific, or intellectual voice is typically associated with an elderly, avuncular character, so its counterpart emotional voice is associated with adolescent characters - Denis Stone, Walter Bidlake, Bernard Marx, John Savage - to name a few from an extensive gallery. They represent a clearly identifiable Huxleian view of the emotional side of human nature, characteristically self-conscious, fearful, insecure, morally ambivalent - and, most significantly, helpless in the face of their own irrationality and others' emotional exploitation. (John Savage is something of an exception, and is discussed in more detail below.) Part of this helplessness, or lack of control, is the inability to learn, and therefore to change. These characters (or character, since they are almost identical) are fixed in a perennial immaturity. Not uncommonly, like Evelyn Waugh's Bright Young Things from Vile Bodies, they are associated with symbols of death (Denis Stone in the hearse, for instance), suggesting brittle vulnerability, where their materialist, intellectual counterparts are invariably tough, impervious to life's rebuffs, seemingly immortal. The view these characters represent of the emotions is one of fear and distrust of the inner forces which prey on and shamefully betray the vulnerable individual. Typically the emotions which animate Huxley's characters are sexual in nature, because they combine so threateningly both biological need and the need for closeness and trust.

The previous chapter drew attention to Huxley's recoil from the biological basis of man's existence, expressed most insistently through his fear of death, especially in Point Counter Point. Any discussion of that novel is inadequate without acknowledgement of the source of the very deepest sense of isolation which lies, not merely in the dilemma of spiritual man in a material universe, but in the sense of division that lies within the individual. (The two are not separate: in fact it is the second, the more psychologically fundamental of the two, which creates the perception of a divided world). Huxley's sense of division and isolation is more fully realized in Point Counter Point than in any of the earlier novels of the twenties. It finds expression both in the characters' sense of their own inner emptiness, or lack of integrity, and in the single dimensional nature of the characters themselves. They are like caricatures or 'monsters' in their predictability and incompleteness, because they represent fragments of Huxley's own personality.

Walter Bidlake, Philip Quarles, and Spandrell, for all that they are Huxley's most fully drawn characters so far, are nevertheless to a large extent walking ideas, and thus represent disconnected fragments of Huxley's view of the world - the emotional, the intellectual and the spiritual. Their discussions, for instance (such as in Ch. 34) are not interactions between listening, responsive, complex beings, but more like an internal debate between consistently predictable viewpoints. This fixed, or static, quality in the characters creates the novel's deepening sense of impasse. There can be no change except disintegration where there is no centre, unity or coherence; and this is felt to apply both to individuals and the divided urban society in which they live, a view of society which echoes Yeats in 1920: 'Things fall apart, the centre cannot hold ...'

The sense of impending collapse which characterizes Point Counter Point, and which is represented through his portrayal of the paralysing divisions in individuals and in society, was largely realized in the following decade in Europe.

> The decade of the thirties opened with a world crisis in trade and ended in the Second World War. It was a period of economic bankruptcy and unemployment; of moral bankruptcy among the democracies facing terror and mass hysteria in the dictatorships; a decade of slither from the rather heady excitement of the twenties into apathy and evasiveness ... imaginative writing became critical and didactic against the pessimistic inertia which writers felt in their society.[9]

The sense of the coming disintegration of western European culture had been registered by many writers before the thirties - Joseph Conrad, T.S. Eliot, D.H. Lawrence, for instance. Huxley's Point Counter Point is remarkable for its startlingly accurate picture of what was to come in the next few years, although he was too much part of his class and generation to see into the heart of the problems, as the above-mentioned writers did. The 'pessimistic inertia' mentioned by Gillie is not so much the subject of Huxley's critical attention as the underlying mood of his writing, manifest in the lack of direction or focus which sprang from his own inner disconnectedness. What partly makes his writing worth reading is 'desperate courage' with which he discloses this inner state and which D.H. Lawrence acknowledged in a letter to Huxley in 1928:

> I have read Point Counter Point with a heart sinking through my boot-soles and a rising admiration. I do think you've shown the truth, perhaps the last truth, about you and your generation, with a really fine courage ... I do think that art has to reveal the palpitating moment or the state of man as it is. And I think you do that, terribly. But what a moment! and what a state! if you can only palpitate to murder, suicide, and rape, in their various degrees - and you state plainly that it is so - caro, however are we going to live through the days? Preparing still another murder, suicide and rape? But it becomes of a

9 Christopher Gillie, Movements in English Literature 1900-1940 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 122.

> phantasmal boredom and produces utlimately inertia, inertia, inertia and final atrophy of the feelings.[10]

Lawrence plainly makes the connection between the inertia which pervades the novel and the atrophy of feeling within Huxley. However there is no concession here that the violence which is a feature of that novel was also a feature of European life at the time. Huxley was reflecting the existing tensions, and possibly the same inertia and atrophy of feeling in the community as that which came from within.

Eyeless in Gaza,[11] published eight years later, shows an even more intense concern with pressing social and political issues and with imminence of war, and true to Gillie's statement above about the literature of the thirties, a more strongly critical and didactic tone. It represents an attempt by Huxley to see his society more objectively, to assess, to make judgements and to align himself with causes. (These are qualities he shared with other novelists and poets of the thirties - Evelyn Waugh, Graham Greene, W.H. Auden, Stephen Spender, among others, although unlike them he chose to pursue an ideology-free path, valuing independence over alignment with the left or the right). There are similarities between Point and Gaza, of setting, social and political concerns, for instance, but Gaza represents a diagnosis of the social and political malaise which Point depicts. Through its central character, Anthony Beavis, it confronts the very disconnectedness which characterized both the subject and tone of Point, and identifies it as the heart of society's, and the author's own problem. Through the consciousness of Anthony Beavis it sets out to order and integrate experience, to achieve unity between disparate parts. Gaza marks a reversal of outlook, from the negative, pessimistic inertia of Point Counter Point to one which

10 D.H. Lawrence in Watt, p. 172.
11 Aldous Huxley, Eyeless in Gaza [1936] (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books in association with Chatto and Windus, 1955).

rests on a belief in the ability of the individual to develop, to progress towards, if not perfection, at least a much improved state, through a sense of his own inner integrity. In this, an apparent contradiction is resolved, in which a belief in evolutionary theory, through its creation of a divided sense of self, had blocked a belief in the evolution of humanity either as a race or as individuals.

Before looking more closely at the extent and nature of the changes which Gaza represents, it is important to consider the novel which preceded it by three years, Brave New World (1932).[12] Although it appears to represent a style and form which stand apart from the general pattern of Huxley's fiction, it forms an essential part of his own evolution. Its form, that of a Utopian fantasy, plays a vital part in his change of direction, presumably because it provided more freedom, through a more direct access to the imagination, than social realism. In this feature, as in others, it reaches back to the whimsical fantasy of Crome Yellow. In that freedom, Huxley was able to break through the impasse of his negative vision.

Brave New World is not simply, as most reviewers and readers have seen it, either a satire on modern society or an attempt to predict the future of technological society, although it includes both those aspects, and indeed owes much of its continuing success to them. If it were to be seen just as those, however, it would have to be considered grossly flawed, for, as Jocelyn Brooke points out:

> ... its main weakness lies ... in the fact that Mr. Huxley argues from an arbitrarily chosen set of premises and ignores a number of present tendencies which are quite as likely to influence the future as the ones with which he

12 Aldous Huxley, Brave New World [1932] ed. Mark Spencer Ellis (London: Longman Group Limited in association with Chatto and Windus Ltd., 1983).

> chooses to deal ... [It] may profitably be compared with ... Orwell's 1984, a far more plausible ... vision of the future ...[13]

But a more recent criticism of Nineteen Eighty Four, throws a useful light on both novels in their capacity as prophecies of the future:

> Besides its overt tidings - 'this is what the world may well be like in the year 1984' - the cryptic message actually conveyed by the underlying complex of fears, revulsions and obsessions in the novel is rather - 'this is what my inner world is really like in 1948.'[14]

Brave New World may well be described in these terms, although it is not just a 'complex of fears, revulsions and obsessions' but a 'complex of processes', in which themes of alienation and disjunction (ironically associated with the World State's motto, 'Community, Identity, Stability') evolve tentatively into themes of reconciliation, acceptance and union. By means of these processes, which are essentially unconscious, Huxley admits the reader into his own changing concept of self and world.

As inner world, Brave New World is a nightmare of scientific materialism in which man controls his own biological destiny. It represents 'progress towards perfection' in an ironical sense.

Although most of the satirical energy of the novel is directed towards the scientific-materialist values represented by the new world, it contains an ambivalence

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13 Brooke, p. 23.

14 D.S. Savage, 'The Fatalism of George Orwell' in Boris Ford (ed.), The New Pelican Guide to English Literature, Vol. 8, The Present (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1983), p. 143.

which can be detected most easily in the slips in control of the narrating voice, such as the following:

> Home, home - a few small rooms, stiflingly over-inhabited by a man, by a periodically teeming woman, by a rabble of boys and girls of all ages. No air, no space; an understerilized prison; darkness, disease, and smells...
> And home was as squalid psychically as physically. Psychically, it was a rabbit hole, a midden, hot with the frictions of tightly packed life, reeking with emotion. What suffocating intimacies, what dangerous, insane, obscene relationships between the members of the family group! Maniacally, the mother brooded over her children (*her* children) ... brooded over them like a cat over its kittens; but a cat that could talk, a cat that could say, 'My baby, my baby,' over and over again. 'My baby, and oh, oh, at my breast, the little hands, the hunger, and that unspeakable agonizing pleasure! Till at last my baby sleeps, my baby sleeps with a bubble of white milk at the corner of his mouth. My little baby sleeps ...'
> 'Yes,' said Mustapha Mond, nodding his head, 'you may well shudder.' (pp. 28-29)

A disgust at the biological realities of human life is never far from the surface in Point Counter Point; here (and often in Gaza), it breaks through, to create a certain confusion about the narrative tone and voice. That same disgust finds its corresponding relief and pleasure in the clean, predictable, efficient, controlled environment of the brave new world: 'Lenina ... returning from the vibro-vac like a pearl illuminated from within, pinkly glowing.' (p. 29)

Even though Huxley mocks the idea of a modern Utopia, there is much in the idea of stability and control that he is attracted to, not to mention the idea of separating man from his biological functions. The complacent, matter-of-fact rationality of the Director of Hatcheries is a joke - but often the joke is on the reader, since what he says is true, and forces a recognition that many of the most popular cultural assumptions are based on superstitution and illusion. The events occurring in Europe at the time Huxley wrote Brave New World were a confirmation of his belief that emotion was a threat on both the public and private levels, representing the

lowest aspects, or the least civilized, of human behaviour. This belief inevitably creates the constant suggestions of endorsement of the values of the 'new world', especially when they are expressed by Mustapha Mond, who is hardly satirized at all.

What makes the novel disturbing is that Huxley is able to enter the world of the scientific-materialist so easily and completely, not just because he sees a need for rational, informed behaviour, but because it is to some extent a reflection of the world he is confined to by his own fear and distrust of emotion. It is a world made safe, stable and predictable by biological science, in which a human being is a chemical equation even to the details of his or her emotional and spiritual life. The novel operates as a conflict between this view, whose expression culminates in the words of Mustapha Mond (Ch. 17), and the view from which the new world's values are mocked, that man is a mysterious, unknowable but noble being. The former view is the familiar 'divided' perspective. The suggestion operates consistently, for instance, that a rigidly classified society is rationally and scientifically justifiable. Huxley endorses it by presuming that only the Alpha Plus males are interesting enough to be taken seriously (a presumption he had admitted to through Philip Quarles's note book in Point Counter Point). A society divided rigidly into groups and classes represents Huxley's characteristically divided mode of thought. The same sense of division and isolated parts is felt in the method of narration, especially in Chapter 3, where the accelerating fragments of conversation and action, although having an ironic relationship to each other, are felt to reflect a meaningless chaos behind the apparent order and reason.

The achievement of Brave New World is to succeed as a bitter but funny and perceptive satire on modern society, and as a philosophical and moral exposé. It is

also an attempt to retrieve some sense of unity and continuity from life's disparateness, particularly through the relationship between Bernard Marx, Helmholtz Watson and John Savage. Each of these characters is isolated in a world which denies the reality of the emotions and the imagination. Like Cardan, Calamy and Chelifer in Those Barren Leaves, they represent contrasting but complementary responses to life. While John Savage is something of an outsider in the trio, Bernard and Helmholtz fit the roles discussed earlier in the chapter - Helmholtz as the scientific, or rational mind, older, erudite and complacent, Bernard as the emotional, self-conscious youth.

As malcontents, or misfits, they are a threat to the perfect, or stable state; in evolutionary terms, they represent diversity and deviation, and therefore the possibility of change and instability. However while they remain in the state of emotional childishness and separateness fostered by the state, they are held in an impasse that precludes change in their own lives. It is when the Savage enters their relationship that they become more fully human.

John Savage is a newcomer at this point in Huxley's gallery of type-characters. Meckier sees him as a response to D.H. Lawrence's Cipriano from The Plumed Serpent and a rejection of Lawrence's admiration of primitivism and blood-philosophy.[15] If he is this, and there are similarities between the two characters and their circumstances, there is still more to the Savage than that. He is required to carry a complex, often contradictory burden of meanings, mostly associated with the values of the nineteenth century. He is a forerunner to Brian Foxe in Eyeless in Gaza and to Pete in After Many a Summer, both of whom also die as victims of a clash of values: all are romantic idealists, ill-adapted to the modern world. In part, they demonstrate

15 Meckier, ch. 4.

the value of modern science in doing away with the old, disabling superstitions and conventions, but they also represent a sense of loss of value and nostalgia.

The death of the Savage, as well as suggesting this loss of value, also carries overtones of fear and contempt of the potential viciousness of the masses. There is a sense of their inexorably demeaning influence on the quality of life of those more sensitive, creative or idealistic. A number of influences made this a not uncommon fear among the more privileged, or the upholders of tradition, in these years: it was expressed, for instance, in the writing of Yeats, T.S. Eliot and D.H. Lawrence, among others.[16] It was a fear that evolutionary theory, with its emphasis on struggle and adaptation, had played its part in creating.

On a more deeply unconscious level, the Savage's death is part of a dramatisation of Huxley's own emotional and spiritual conflict and resolution. It is the culmination of a sequence of events which occupies the final section of the novel (Chs. 12-18), and leads from his sense of inner division and isolation towards greater self-acceptance and integration. Although, confusingly, the Savage is the product of a civilization that Huxley criticizes as barbaric, he represents the romantic ideal of the Noble Savage, doomed by the corruption of society past and present. The qualities that Huxley most apparently admires in him are his rich imagination and emotional life which imbue every aspect of living with spiritual meaning. As a contrast to the creatures of the Brave New World he represents fully integrated, free humanity, but Huxley's pessimism ensures that the past and present combine to produce his disintegration and death. Before his death, the Savage has a significant effect on the

16 See David Craig and Michael Egan, 'Decadence and Crack Up' in Stephen Knight and Michael Wilding, The Radical Reader (Sydney: Wild and Woolley, 1977) for a discussion on the influence of the Russian Revolution on the literature of the twenties and thirties.

lives of Bernard and Helmholtz, so that in some sense part of him survives to continue with them in their escape from modern society. The dramatic climax of the relationship between the three men occurs in the rebellion scene (Ch. 15) where Helmholtz and, less willingly, Bernard, recognize their own death-like submission to the rational state. They fight with the Savage to reject the confines of reason and science and to force a recognition of a more powerful reality issuing from the heart and spirit of mankind:

> 'Free, free!' the Savage shouted, and with one hand continued to throw the *soma* into the area while, with the other, he punched the indistinguishable faces of his assailants. 'Free!' And suddenly there was Helmholtz at his side - 'Good old Helmholtz' - also punching - 'Men at last' - and in the interval also throwing the poison out by handfuls through the open window. 'Yes, men! men!' and there was no more poison left. He picked up the cash-box and showed them its black emptiness. 'You're free!' (Brave New World, p. 175)

The scene is a consummation of the friendship, and from this point on, Bernard and Helmholtz are like parts of a single entity in which the Savage is also included; they are imbued with a sense of purpose and direction. Like the heroes in all other Huxley novel endings, they leave the society which has made it impossible to live as free, whole human beings. The difference between the ending of Brave New World and the earlier novels lies in the 'fusion' of characters, the suggestion of choice in destination, and the spirit of comparative optimism and anticipation of change which contrasts dramatically with the bleak view of human destiny represented by the society they have left.

For Huxley, this foreshadowed a new philosophical direction. It was not that he dismissed the scientific-rational view as the complete answer to human fulfilment. He had thrown doubt on it already through Shearwater and Edward Tantamount - and

anyway, he indicates a reasonably high degree of acceptance of Mustapha Mond's values. Nor was it because he rejected traditional Western values, which he had also already done in earlier novels. It lay rather in the overcoming of the self-division that had afflicted him. He demonstrated a dawning acceptance of aspects of himself for which he had until then felt contempt. Through the death of the Savage, and through the inclusion of the timid, self-conscious Bernard in a final twosome with the Calamy-like Helmholtz, Huxley accepted his own limitations and acknowledged his need to find inner harmony and fulfilment within his own cerebral, detached nature. The return to a 'Calamy' type alone suggests Huxley's renewed interest in the mystical as an alternative to a full emotional engagement with life. It is confirmed by the choice of the bleak, isolated Falkland Islands as an alternative to society, suggesting a withdrawn, contemplative, ascetic state of mind.

David Daiches, writing in 1939, saw Huxley's mysticism as an escape from his disappointment at life's failures to live up to its Victorian promises, particularly the promise of science and progress:

> The greater your desire to believe in what was gone, the greater your resentment at finding that it was not there. Hence you write satiric pictures of modern life, not out of a feeling of superiority or amused contempt or cynical indifference - not like Wells in some of his novels or like Shaw in his plays or yet like Norman Douglas in South Wind - but out of a feeling of horror, out of frustration, nostalgia, intense disappointment. And the more romantic you are, the fiercer will be your satiric picture of contemporary society, because the more disappointed and frustrated you will have been rendered by the modern scene. In the end you will either go crazy, as Swift did, or comfort yourself with a personal mysticism - a romantic view which will not required to be tested by the facts - as Huxley has done.[17]

17 D. Daiches, in Watt, p.304.

But if Huxley was frustrated at the failure of the Victorian dream of progress and perfection, he retrieved some part of it in Brave New World, ironically enough written when there seemed every reason to feel cynical about progress. He broke through his divided sense of self for the first time to experience a consciousness of change, or personal evolution. For the first time he was to write a novel based on a concept of individuals not as fixed and immutable, tied humiliatingly to their animal origins, but capable of development.

Eyeless in Gaza recounts the evolution of Anthony Beavis, as he sorts through the fragments of his life in middle age to try and find some connection between the grief-stricken small boy of thirty years before and the cold, alienated, irresponsible adult of the present. As a literary work, it is very mixed, containing some of Huxley's most verbose and pedantic passages, as well as some of his most skilfully and movingly written. Those of the second variety belongs largely to the account of the friendship between Anthony and Brian, the source of most of the novel's tension.

Even though the events which take place occur early in Anthony's life, the chronology is re-arranged in such a way that Brian's death and Anthony's role in it are revealed near the end of the novel. They provide the novel's climax as Anthony, having re-entered his own past, progressively re-discovers his own moral nature and his relationship with the rest of humanity in a search culminating with the memory of his betrayal of his friend. Only then are the disconnected fragments of his life brought together, as he accepts the responsibility for his past and becomes free to engage in the process of change. Unlike Huxley's earlier novels, which denied the possibility of change and growth, Gaza is based thematically and structurally on the ideas of synthesis, integration, growth, unity and relationship. The stylistic

difficulties this change of orientation created for Huxley are evident in the formal complexity and narrative discontinuity of Gaza. Joseph Bentley suggests that in upgrading the flesh to become 'an objective correlative of spiritual reality' Huxley undermined the satirical basis of his style.

> The constant implication of Huxley's early books is that vile flesh makes nonsense of ideas, but his mysticism purges flesh of its pejorative overtones and thus hinders its operation as a satiric agent. It can function as a *memento mori*, as an image suggesting "the body of this death" which might eventually be transcended; but it will not function in the old Baudelairean way as an allotrope of the absurdity and meaninglessness of existence ... His satiric technique had depended on the connotative lowness of the flesh. When, in Point Counter Point, he had described the development of a child from worm to fish to foetus and then had shifted to a scene fifteen years later where the ex-fish could be seen passionately engaged in a high-church confirmation ritual, the result was wickedly incisive nihilistic satire. But the later Huxley, when consistent with his new evaluation of the flesh, is obliged to see the physiological fact as merely that - a fact. The mystic is forced to relinquish the aristocrat's prerogative of bad taste. Huxley's later sense of the facticity of flesh blurs and distorts his style; it creates a radical discontinuity in his work between meanings and rhetorical effects.[18]

An early scene from Gaza demonstrates the 'radical discontinuity' Bentley mentions. As two lovers, Anthony and Helen, lie on a sunny roof top in France, a dog falls from a passing plane, exploding on impact next to the spot where they lie (Ch. 12). The idea represents absurdity taken to exaggerated and grotesque lengths. As the catalyst for Anthony's change towards a persisting and integrated self, this event is the moral pivot of the novel. Yet over-riding its suggestions of human frailty and mortality, it contains more than ever a sense of disgust, shame and horror at the physiological basis of life. Many other scenes from Gaza are similar in this respect; for example, Helen's abortion (Ch. 39) or Staithes's amputation (Ch. 49). In Huxley's new vision of unity it is still physiology that delineates the boundaries of

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18 J. Bentley, 'The Later Novels of Huxley', in Kuehn (ed.), p. 149.

human experience, but described with an aversion that alienates and distances the reader.

Although it is easy to see that Huxley did develop in the terms referred to here throughout the first 15 years of his life as a writer, some problems remain in assessing the significance of that growth. For one thing, his ability as a writer did not, on the whole, develop correspondingly. And from the point where he achieved his belief in growth, he lost the verve and energy that had been so characteristic of much of his writing, and which had made him so interesting and challenging to his contemporaries of the twenties. As Bentley suggested above, the reason for this loss lay largely in the fact that the energy which lay behind his best writing was largely negative, that is, based on feelings such as anger, disappointment, frustration. In his earliest work, such as Crome Yellow, such feelings are controlled by a light, ironic perspective; later, as his negative feelings grew, disgust and contempt were to dominate his tone, making his irony much more heavy handed and almost crude. Much of Point Counter Point is an example of this, for instance the description of the waning romantic love between Walter and Marjorie. Gaza abounds in more extreme examples, as does Huxley's next novel, After Many a Summer (1939).[19]

Before its publication, Huxley left England to live in America, ending the most creative period of his life in a manner reminiscent of his novels' heroes. Although After Many a Summer contains some well-written and amusing glimpses of American life, it suffers from an intensification of the same flaws that had marred his earlier novels - Propter, for instance, is far more pedantic than Rampion, and even than Miller. The finish of Huxley's best years as a fiction writer was possibly partly

19 Aldous Huxley, After Many a Summer [1939] (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books in association with Chatto and Windus, 1955).

due to the loss of contact with his native society: it had provided a continuing stimulus for the negative, comic energy which has since placed him, alongside Evelyn Waugh, as one of the most representative writers of English fiction in the period between the wars.

Huxley represents the feelings of a generation placed in a moral and spiritual limbo, bereft of a sense of meaning in traditional terms, or of any sense of cultural continuity with the past. His path to a new sense of values, described in detail in Gaza, was based on mysticism and meditation, and did not find favour with a reading public on the verge of a world war. This was particularly the case since mystical experience is by its very nature difficult, if not impossible, to communicate in the language of the novel. But it represented a coming to terms with the social and personal past, and a means of being able to face a threatening future with equilibrium and even optimism. The sense of his own capacity to 'evolve' or develop, had become the means to perceive the same process, on a vast scale, in the world about him.

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